The Son of Man: A Philological and Exegetical Study

This dissertation concerns the meaning of the phrase 'Son of Man', which occurs multiple times throughout all four Gospels.

It is here necessary to set out some presuppositions which will guide my discussion. First, I believe the historical Jesus did in fact use the phrase Son of Man, and therefore disagree with the scholars who regard it as a creation of the early church.[1] With the majority of scholars, I think this likely because (1) apart from a couple of instances in Revelation and Acts, the phrase appears exclusively on the lips of Jesus (although note John 12:34); (2) it appears in multiple independent sources, namely Mark (e.g. 2:10), Q (e.g. Luke 12:8), M (e.g. Matthew 25:31), L (e.g. Luke 22:48), John (e.g. John 1:51); and (3) it reflects Semitic idiom which makes it unlikely the creation of a Greek speaking evangelist.[2] My second presupposition is that Jesus primarily spoke Aramaic and here I follow for example Casey and Fitzmyer.[3] Whilst these scholars are, in my view, too closed to the possibility that Jesus could have spoken Hebrew and Greek in addition to Aramaic, I think they are substantially correct.[4]

In attempting to answer our question, then, we must use the Greek expression for Son of Man to determine the underlying Aramaic expression. This will allow us to examine all the relevant Aramaic usages and determine its meaning at the time of Jesus. This will form the first part of the essay. The second part will then apply that discussion in an exegesis of a single synoptic passage. As a side-note, although I otherwise use gender-inclusive language, for the sake of convenience and as a matter of scholarly convention I retain the phrase 'Son of *Man'* rather than attempt to introduce the cumbersome 'Son of Humanity.'

Part One

The English phrase 'Son of Man' (henceforth SM) is a literal translation of Greek ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου which appears in many places throughout the Gospels. Almost without exception it appears in the above form: nominative definite article + noun+ genitive article + noun, and in a genitive relationship. Both nouns take the definite article according to Apollonius' Canon.[5] The one exception to this practice of assigning articles to both nouns is in John 5:27 where the anarthrous υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου appears, but this is the exception that proves the rule and may have an important contextual purpose.[6] I feel it important to take a moment to consider this expression as Greek, for too quickly many scholars turn to the putative Semitic original and attempt to understand it on that basis. The first thing to note is it is possible to explain it without reference to Semitic languages. Lukaszewski, following Moulton, notes that it satisfies the rules of Greek grammar, containing two articles in a genitive construction.[7] Furthermore, the semantic domain of υἱὸς to some extent corresponds with the Semitic equivalents, and the same holds for ἀνθρώπος. Under the entry for υἱὸς LSJ cites as an example of the plural usage ἰατρῶν υἱεῖς lit. "sons of physicians" meaning simply "physicians."[8] Considering the articular ἀνθρώπος as generic, then, the phrase could mean

1 See for instance Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 123.
2 For all these arguments see Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology, Part One: The Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden) (London: SCM Press, 1971), 264-268.
3 Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 76-79; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 38-43.
4 For a scholar more open to Jesus' use of Greek, see James H. Charlesworth, "Can One Recover Aramaic Sources Behind Mark's Gospel?", *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* vol. 5 (2) (2002): 249-258, 254.
5 For this terminology see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 250.
6 See e.g. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 215.
7 Albert Lukaszewski, "Issues Concerning the Aramaic Behind ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου: A Critical Review of Scholarship," in '*Who is this Son of Man?': The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus* (eds. Larry Hurtado and Paul Owen) (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 13.
8 H. G. Liddel and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (abridged) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1871), 725.

"the one belonging to the class humankind," i.e. "the human being." However, it should be noted that according to LSJ this meaning attaches to the noun in the plural and not necessarily the singular. Secondly, throughout the Greek Gospels the phrase is used only by Jesus (although see above); is consistently articular, definite and titular; and refers exclusively to Jesus. In other words, it is a third person self description. Third, the phrase in Greek is fairly elastic and the history of interpretation bears this out. In his survey of SM research Burkett shows how many church fathers understood it in a literal sense to mean "the physical son of the human" and often regarded the latter as Joseph or Mary.[9] It is thus difficult to ascertain what significance, if any, the gospel writers attached to the phrase per se. And this, together with the fact the phrase is slightly awkward in Greek but regularly attested in Semitic leads me to agree with the majority of scholars that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is in fact a literal translation of Aramaic or Hebrew.

A rather consistent feature of the SM debate, particularly in reference to Semitic languages, is a lack of clarity in terminology and definitions. I would like, therefore, to establish what I mean by the terms I use. In Hebrew an *indefinite* noun is usually morphologically unmarked and according to Waltke-O'Connor (henceforth WO) 'focuses on the *class* to which the referent belongs, its quality and character.'[10] In English we tend to render this with the indefinite article 'a' which is wanting in Hebrew. On the other hand, *definite* nouns often, but not always, take the definite article and direct 'attention to the referent's identity.'[11] In English this is rendered by 'the.' Hebrew grammars tend not to use the term 'generic noun,' but refer rather to 'collective' nouns. WO, for example, write 'With *collectives* the singular designates a group' and Gesenius' Grammar distinguishes between collectives whose individual members are denoted by a different noun (e.g. צאן 'flock,' שה 'a sheep') and those which designate individual members using the same noun (e.g. אדם 'humankind,' אדם 'a human').[12] Collectives are often used without the article.[13] WO also discuss 'class nouns' which in the singular 'indicate a particular class or group' and are often used 'in enumerations.'[14] However, in discussion of the function of the *article* we find the term 'generic' and WO explain:

> The article of class [or 'generic article' as several sentences below] marks out not a particular single person or thing but a class of persons, things or qualities that are unique and determined in themselves.[15]

They comment further: 'The generic article may be used with a *collective singular'* (italics original) and then cite as an example Qohelet 3:17:

את הצדיק ואת הרשע

'*the righteous* and *the wicked'* (italics original)[16]

Important to note also is a particular use of the generic article with collective noun where 'an individual within the species is singled out to represent the genus.'[17] This is 'especially common with animals' and we might cite 1 Samuel 17:34 where David, talking about his previous experience with the sling, says:[18]

רעה היה עבדך לאביו בצאן ובא הארי ואת הדוב ונשא שה מהעדר

9 Burkett, *Debate*, 8-11.
10 Bruce Waltke and Michael O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 13.2b.
11 WO, 13.2b.
12 WO, 7.2.1; Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar; Enlarged by E. Kautzsch; Translated by A. E. Cowley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 123a-b.
13 WO, 7.2.1c.
14 WO, 7.2.2.
15 WO, 13.5.1f.
16 WO, 13.5.1f; the same terminology in Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naude, Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (2nd ed.) (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 24.4.4 (4).
17 WO, 13.5.1f.
18 WO, 13.5.1f for quote.

your servant was a shepherd to his father over the flock, and it would come *a* [lit. "the"] *lion* or *a* [lit. "the"] *bear* and carry off a sheep from the flock...

Here David is not referring to one particular lion or bear but means animals belonging to either genus, and hence we can translate with the indefinite article 'a.' Finally, the generic article can be used with plural nouns.[19] The second noun, then, in the Hebrew phrase בן אדם is anarthrous and collective, "son of humankind." Most scholars then also use this terminology to describe Aramaic. However, in place of 'collective nouns' we often find the designation 'generic nouns' and, although potentially imprecise, for the sake of consistency I will retain 'generic' in my discussion.

In Aramaic, determination is often expressed through the suffixing of an Aleph or He, as with אנש whose determinate form is אנשא "humankind" and דהב where we occasionally find דהבה "gold."[20] In Hebrew, the definite article takes the form of a prefixed He as, for example, האדם "humankind."[21] In both Hebrew and Aramaic the genitive relation, as in other Semitic languages, is often expressed through the construct chain whereby two nouns are placed side by side, the first functioning as the 'nomen regens' and the second as the 'nomen rectum.'[22] This is a very common phenomenon which we observe in phrases like דגי הים in Hebrew and נוני ימא in Aramaic, both meaning "fish of the sea" (Genesis 9:2 MT and Targum Onkelos). SM is often in a construct chain and, without determination, appears in Aramaic as בר אנש and in Hebrew asבן אדם. The first noun in this expression is not used to mean a physical descendent but rather a "member of a group."[23] The second, in both languages, is generic/collective meaning "humankind" and, without the emphatic state/definite article, the whole could be paraphrased "one belonging to humankind," i.e. "a human being."[24] The phrases in their determined forms would be בר אנשא in Aramaic, בן האדם in Hebrew, "the son of man," i.e. "*the* individual belonging to humankind." There are, however, a number of other ways of expressing the genitive relation in Aramaic. At Qumran alone we find: construct + absolute (בר אנש); emphatic + emphatic (ברא אנשא); absolute + relative particle + absolute (בר דאנש); construct + relative particle + absolute (בר דאנש); emphatic + relative particle + emphatic (ברא דאנשא); construct with proleptic suffix + relative particle + absolute (ברה דאנש).[25] Although each form could have been used by Jesus, they are not all extant in Aramaic sources, meaning some of the above are my own hypothetical reconstructions. In reality, we tend to find the simple construct phrase בר אנש but it is helpful to be reminded of further possibilities, especially given the meagre Aramaic data we possess from the 1st century CE.

If we assume, then, Jesus spoke primarily in Aramaic, to what Aramaic sources should we refer when considering the New Testament and the sayings of Jesus? This is a difficult question, but let us first mention the work of Joseph Fitzmyer who in several publications has attempted to categorise Aramaic into distinct time periods: *Old Aramaic* (ca. 925-700 BCE), *Official Aramaic* (700-200 BCE), *Middle Aramaic* (200 BCE- 200 CE), *Late Aramaic* (200-700 CE), and *Modern Aramaic*, which is still spoken.[26] Good historical methodology would dictate we use texts from as close to the NT era as possible, and Fitzmyer accordingly argues that, if possible, only Middle Aramaic should be considered in discussions about the NT and language of Jesus.[27] What should be regarded as Middle Aramaic, though, is not always clear, and scholars have often disagreed, but some texts we can include here with a degree of certainty. For Fitzmyer they are as follows: The

19 WO, 13.5.1f.
20 Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (7th exp. ed.) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 27-28.
21 WO, 13.3.
22 Rosenthal, *Biblical Aramaic*, 29; WO, 9.1c.
23 William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 42, although he cites SM under a different heading.
24 Holladay, *Lexicon*, 4; 398.
25 Lukaszewski, "Critical Review," 22-23.
26 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Phases of the Aramaic Language," in *A Wandering Aramean; The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1 (1Q20): A Commentary* (3rd ed.) (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2004), 30-32.
27 Fitzmyer, *Wandering Aramean*, 8.

Aramaic documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls; various tomb inscriptions, letters and legal documents found in and around Palestine; and the Megillath Taanith.[28] Most contemporary scholars would also include the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan.[29] The dating of the fragment Targum, Neofiti and Cairo Geniza has been much discussed, but most experts would assign these to Late Aramaic.[30] This situation is not ideal, since language can change a great deal within a short time, but these Middle Aramaic texts are the closest we can get to Jesus' language and we do well to use them as our primary sources.

A number of scholars have contended that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in the Gospels, either through misunderstanding or deliberate change, does not accurately represent the putative underlying Aramaic. In their view, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου conceals a certain Aramaic idiom or circumlocution which was supposedly common at the time of Jesus and never used as a title. But is this correct? To test this hypothesis I would like now to carry out a detailed examination of בר אנש and its variant forms in the Middle Aramaic texts with a view to establishing what it meant around the time of Jesus. I will then discuss, in light of this examination, the most important scholars who have held this view. The various occurrences of the phrase have helpfully been collected in an article by Paul Owen and David Shepherd, and I use this extensively in what follows.[31] I will begin by surveying the examples from Qumran and Targums Onkelos and Jonathan.

Qumran

The Aramaic literature from Qumran is not extensive and much of it is fragmentary, but it does preserve several examples of our phrase both in the singular and the plural. The first text for consideration is from the corpus of Enoch literature and is contained in fragment 23, line 8, and in the second copy of the section known as Astronomical Enoch (4Q209). In this fragment the speaker Enoch seems to be describing the structure of the universe to his son Methuselah and in line 8 we read:

...ארעא חד מנהון למדבר בה בני אנשא וחד מנהון...

As shown by the ellipses, the beginning and end of this line are missing and scholars restore them in different ways. Owen and Shepherd restore at the beginning שמש וירח לאתחזיא מן and at the end לכל ימיא thus producing the translation:

sun [and (the) moon] so as to be seen [from] the earth: one of them to lead mankind by it, and one of them [for all the seas…][32]

Different restorations and translations are offered by others but significantly, when the author wants to refer to human beings collectively he uses the phrase בני אנשא consisting of the plural of בן and the emphatic state of אנש.[33]

The second example is from the section of Enoch known as 'the Book of Giants' which is not found in Ethiopic Enoch. The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (henceforth CAL) cites it as 4Q531 14:4, but Garcia-Martinez-Tigchelaar (henceforth GMT) as 9:4.[34] In any case, the text according to the latter version reads:

28 Fitzmyer, *Wandering Aramean,* 73.
29 See e.g. Thomas O. Lambdin, *An Introduction to the Aramaic of Targum* (rev. John Huehnergard) (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, no date given), 5-6.
30 Lambdin, *Introduction,* 6.
31 Paul Owen and David Shepherd, "Speaking up for Qumran, Dalman and the Son of Man: Was *Bar Enasha* a Common Term for 'Man' in the Time of Jesus?", *JSNT* 81 (2001): 81-122.
32 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 108.
33 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 108.
34 https://cal.huc.edu/, last visited 28/09/22; Florentino Garcia Martinez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition* (2 vols.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, 1998 respectively), in loc.

יתב בין בני אנש ולא אלף מנהון

There are several possible understandings of this passage depending on whether the negative particle לא is to be reconstructed before the first verb and how one vocalises the verbs. CAL reconstructs the negative particle and vocalises the verbs as participles yielding 'he does not dwell among men and does not learn from them.'[35] GMT on the other hand lack the particle and vocalise the verbs as perfects: 'he dwelt among men but did not learn from them.'[36] Grammatical questions aside, the text apparently refers to some heavenly being, perhaps Enoch, who is contrasted with human beings, 'sons of men,' the phrase consisting of plural בני and אנש in the absolute state.

The third text is from the Qumran Job Targum 9:9 only part of which is still extant. The text as given by GMT is as follows:

רמתא ובר אנש תולעתא

They translate: '[a maggot, and a hu]man being a wor[m'[37]

Although the text is fragmentary it clearly renders literally the Hebrew of Job 25:6: 'How much less man (אנוש), a maggot, and a son of man (בן אדם), a worm.' The meaning of the Aramaic text is uncontroversial and it clearly shows that בר אנש in the absolute state is a natural rendering of the Hebrew equivalent. Unlike the example from Enoch, however, it is used in an indefinite sense to denote an unspecified human being.[38]

The next passage is from the same text 26:2-3 which Owen-Shepherd (since minor error in GMT) transcribe,

כות]ך חטיך ולבר אנש צדקתך

Once again, although this text is fragmentary, it is easily restored on the basis of the Masoretic Text which has 'your wickedness is for a man (לאיש) like yourself, And your righteousness is for a son of man (לבן אדם)' (NASB). This text likewise demonstrates the indefinite use of בר אנש which, once again, translates the Hebrew rather literally.[39]

A probable example is found also in 13:9-10 but since part of the phrase has to be reconstructed, I leave it out of the present analysis. The next relevant example, then, is from 38:2-3 which reads according to GMT

כל אנשא עלוהי חזין ובני אנשא מרחיק [עלוה]י יבקון

The Hebrew reads 'all people (כל אדם) have seen it, humankind (אנוש) looks from afar' which the Aramaic again closely follows in most places, except this time, instead of the singular, we have the plural 'sons of man.'[40] This was apparently an acceptable way to render the singular noun in the Hebrew text.[41]

The remaining examples from Qumran are found in 1*QGenesis Apocryphon* which appears to be an early form of midrash on the book of Genesis. About to enter Egypt, Abraham has a dream

35 https://cal.huc.edu/, last visited 28/09/22
36 GMT, 1067.
37 GMT (vol. 2), in loc.
38 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 108.
39 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 109.
40 GMT (vol. 2), in loc.
41 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 110.

presaging the fate of his wife upon meeting the people of Egypt, and the two characters are represented as a cedar and a date palm respectively. In 19:15 we read,

ובנ]י אנוש אתו ובעון למקץ ולמעקר ל[א]רזא

The second verb is either a perfect, as here transcribed, or a participle if yod is to be read rather than waw.[42] Here an indefinite/partitive sense attaches to the plural phrase 'sons of men' which means nothing more than 'some people/men,' so Fitzmyer translates the whole 'Some men came, seeking to cut down and uproot the cedar...'[43]

The next passage appears earlier in this work and in the context of a first person monologue by Noah who in 6:8-9 says,

באדין לבני נשין נסבת מן בנת אחי ובנתי לבני אחי יהבת כדת חוק עלמא [די יהב]ה עליא לבני אנשא

Then I took wives for my sons from the daughters of my brothers, and I gave my daughters to the sons of my brothers according to the eternal law [which] the Most High gave to human beings[44]

This time we have a plural phrase but used to denote humankind in general.[45]

Toward the end of the extant text of the Genesis Apocryphon we find the familiar story of God showing Abraham the land which he and his descendants would possess, and here we find our last example from Qumran (21:13):

ואשגה זרעך כעפר ארעא די לא ישכח כול בר אנוש לממניה ואף זרעך לא יתמנה

And I will multiply your seed like he dust of the earth which no son of man is able to number, and also your seed will not be (able to be) numbered.[46]

Here we find an example of our phrase used in the singular, indefinite sense, but as virtually an indefinite pronoun (see below on Vermes). However, as is typical of Semitic languages, the negative particle directly precedes the verb rather than the subject, hence literally 'any son of man is not able.'

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, then, we observe several forms of our expression. First there is the indefinite singular use 'a son of man'; second, a plural emphatic 'the sons of men'; and third, a plural absolute 'sons of man.' Significantly, as Owen and Shepherd emphasise, there is no example of the singular emphatic '*the* son of man,' still less one meaning 'humankind' in a generic sense. The generic is signified rather by some of the above expressions but also by אנש in either emphatic or absolute form. Following Dalman, they conclude that at the time of Jesus, SM in the absolute state was a poetic way of referring to a human being or humankind, and, when used elsewhere, was required by contextual considerations.[47] This observation certainly holds for most of the examples above which come from the Job Targum, itself based on a poetical Hebrew text. Nevertheless, the last example they concede as an obstacle to their argument, for it is not obviously poetry, nor does it translate a poetic original. The passage, however, deals with the descendants of Abraham and this, they argue, is the context that calls forth '*son* of man' instead of simply 'man.'[48] This is certainly possible, and without consideration of later Aramaic texts it may be the best explanation. Whilst I

42 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 112; Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon,* 98.
43 Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon,* 99.
44 Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon,* 77.
45 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 113.
46 Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon,* 104 for text; translation mine.
47 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 105.
48 Owen and Shepherd, "Speaking up," 115-116.

am unsure about their argument here, their conclusion that בר אנשא is not used in the Dead Sea Scrolls to mean 'humankind' is certainly justified.

Other Middle Aramaic Material

There are several instances of SM in the remaining Middle Aramaic material, but for the sake of space, let us then inquire after only examples in the emphatic state, the form which apparently lies behind the Greek Gospels.[49] In an overview, Shepherd can point to two instances of our phrase in the emphatic state.[50] Taking them in reverse order, let us consider first Isaiah 56:2a. The Aramaic text reads,

טובי אנשא דיעביד דא ובר אנשא דיתקף בה

blessed is the person who does this and the son of man who holds it fast

At first glance it may appear we have an example of SM in the singular emphatic state used generically, but on closer inspection it is clear it refers to a specific human being who performs a certain function. It is therefore an example of a restrictive relative clause in which said clause specifies a certain type of human, rather than making a statement about humanity generally, which in this context would be manifestly false. As Shepherd notes, it is also likely due to a literal translation of the underlying Hebrew בן אדם.[51] The other text is Isaiah 51:12 which reads,

אנה אנה הוא מנחמכון ממן אתון דחלין מאנשא דמאית ומבר אנשא דכעסבא חשיב

I, I am he who comforts you; of whom are you afraid? Of human beings who die? Or of the son of man who is reckoned as grass?

To this text Shepherd applies the same explanation as Isaiah 56:2a above, but here I disagree with his analysis.[52] The latter two interrogative clauses seem to be synthetically parallel, the first a generic statement about the fate of all humans, the second saying as much but with different wording. It is similar to such passages as Psalm 103:15a 'As for man (אנוש), his days are like grass...' (ESV) and Isaiah 40:6b 'All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field' (ESV) which likewise emphasise the mortality of all human beings. Since in 51:12 we have a statement applicable to all people, the relative clause must be non restrictive and thus בר אנשא generic.[53]

The Palestinian Targums

Due to their later date, it is understandable some scholars have been hesitant to use the Targums of Neofiti, Cairo Geniza and the Fragment Targum to illuminate the New Testament. But many are still positive about the value of these texts for reconstructing 1st century Aramaic. Kaufman, for instance, although assigning their composition to a later time period, believes that literary Aramaic is fairly static and that a later text can thus represent an earlier form of the language.[54] On the other hand, Fitzmyer is not so sanguine about their value in contrast to the Qumran material.[55] He also takes issue with the morphology of אנש in these later texts where prepositive aleph undergoes aphaeresis

49 David Shepherd, "Resolving the Son of Man 'Problem' in Aramaic," in '*Who is this Son of Man?': The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus* (eds. Larry Hurtado and Paul Owen) (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 57-58.
50 Shepherd, "Resolving," 56-57.
51 Shepherd, "Resolving," 56.
52 Shepherd,"Resolving," 56-57.
53 See also Bruce Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 57.
54 Stephen A. Kaufman, "On Methodology in the Study of the Targums and their Chronology," *JSNT* 23 (1985): 117-124.
55 Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon,* 33-34.

and the noun appears as נש, the whole phrase being בר נש and sometimes even written as one word ברנש. In all Middle Aramaic texts, he argues, aleph is always present and it is therefore methodologically unsound to use texts with this different morphology.[56] Geza Vermes responded to his arguments by pointing to the Hebrew/Aramaic name Eleazar which appears in several texts including the inscription from Givat Hamivtar, the first two lines of which read:[57]

אנה אבה בר כהנה א
לעז[ר] בר אהרן רבה

I, Abba, son of the priest El-
az[ar], son of Aaron the elder[58]

He then notes the same name in Greek inscriptions and the New Testament name Λάζαρος which is the Greek counterpart.[59] This supposedly evidences at least the non-pronunciation of initial aleph and perhaps even its aphaeresis in Middle Aramaic.[60] By extension, the dropping of aleph in the noun נש is not necessarily a sign of lateness, and Vermes believes this was a feature of Galilean Aramaic.[61] Fitzmyer, however, regards the name Λάζαρος as a hypocoristic form, a shortening of a longer name, a practice found in many languages. It therefore provides no evidence for the aphaeresis of initial aleph in common nouns such as אנש.[62] On the one hand, I think Fitzmyer has the stronger argument, but on the other I am not entirely convinced it is relevant for the son of man debate, for I do not see why a change in morphology should signal a change in meaning. Fitzmyer himself does not say as much, only that it signals a late form, but the corollary is that the meaning may likewise be different. However, the meaning of words can also remain stable notwithstanding a change in morphology. For example, in earlier Aramaic texts the suffix on III-Yod verbs in the imperfect conjugation is regularly Aleph or He, but in later ones Yod begins to take their place, meaning, for example, we find יגלא in earlier texts, יגלי in later ones, both forms translated "he will reveal." This seems to be due to an interchangeability of Aleph and Yod noted by Dalman, but it does not obviously signal a change in meaning.[63] In the same way, the noun נש may retain the meaning it had in earlier texts, and therefore it is important still to consider the meaning of these alternative forms.

With due caution then, I will consider the use of SM in the Targums of Neofiti and Cairo Geniza. We have seen above both that the Greek of the Gospels suggests an underlying determinate form and that the Aramaic from Qumran, and Onkelos and Jonathan does not provide this, except for in two instances. But do these Targums? Again, I will initially narrow my search and discuss only forms of our phrase in the emphatic state. Neofiti has several instances of this form, the first occurring in Genesis 1:26, the creation of humankind. The text is as follows

וברא ממרה דיי ית בר נשא בדמותיה

And the Memra of the Lord created the son of man in his image...

SM here translates the underlying Hebrew האדם and both words/phrases are to be understood generically since the creation of humankind is in view. Furthermore, the object of this act of creation is elucidated in the rest of the verse, consisting of 'male and female' (Hebrew) or 'a male

56 Fitzmyer, "The New Testament Title "Son of Man" Philologically Considered," in *Wandering Aramean*, 149-151.
57 Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1973), 190.
58 Fitzmyer, "New Testament Title," 150.
59 Vermes, *Jesus*, 189.
60 Vermes, *Jesus*, 190.
61 Vermes, *Jesus*, 190.
62 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Another View of the 'Son of Man' Debate," *JSNT* 4 (1979): 58-68, 63.
63 Gustaf Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch* (Liepzig: J. R. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1894), 69.

and his spouse' (Neofiti). Here, then, we have a clear use of our phrase in the emphatic state and meaning 'humankind.'

In verses 2:18, 23, however, we encounter our phrase with potentially a different nuance. In the former passage God or his Memra (depending on the version) says in soliloquy

לא תקן יהוי בר נשא לבלחודוי

it is not proper for the son of man to be by himself

and in the latter Adam proclaims

הדא זמנא ולא עוד תתברא אתה מן בר נשה

this time and not again woman is created from the son of man

In the first passage the phrase is unlikely generic as we might then expect a contrast with animals rather than woman, who in the previous chapter has been included in humankind (1:27). It could therefore be indefinite, despite the emphatic state, and function as a maxim which is applied to the present context i.e. "a man/male should not be alone and thus the creation of woman is required." But it most likely is a description of Adam, referred to in previous verses, and this is confirmed by the second half of the verse where God states "I will make a spouse *for him* (ליה)." In the second passage I regard the reference as indefinite and the whole as a maxim, also suggested by the absolute state of the first noun אתה "a woman," hence 'the son of man' = 'a man.' Both passages, then, evidence a usage of our phrase meaning a 'male human being' and used both definitely and indefinitely.

In Genesis 40:23 we find an indictment of Joseph for trusting in the chief cup-bearer followed by a quote from Jeremiah 17:5. The Aramaic of Neofiti reads according to CAL:

לייט יהוי בר נשא די תרחץ בבשרא

Cursed is the son of man who trusts in flesh

This text, however, contains gender discord since the verb is feminine but the subject masculine. Sokoloff's dictionary has דיתרחץ with the verb in the Gt stem which makes better sense.[64] Anyhow, we have here an example of our phrase used definitely, but to represent a class of persons, similar to the usage in the Targum of Isaiah 56:2a above.

In Genesis 49:22 we find a description of Joseph as one 'who does not go after the seeing of his eye or the delusions of his heart,' for 'they are what destroy the son of man (בר נשא) from the world.' The fragment targum has almost the same wording. Once again the usage could either be indefinite or generic.

In Neofiti to Deuteronomy 20:19, a passage concerning instructions for war, we find the command against cutting down the trees in an enemy land, and the reason given is that 'a/the tree is not as a/the son of man (בר נשא),' demonstrating either the indefinite or generic use.

The next important passage for our discussion is Genesis 9:5 which uses our phrase phrase a number of times. Here Yahweh is re-establishing his covenant with humankind, now represented by Noah and his family, and in verse nine he stresses the importance of retributive justice on account of the sacredness of blood. There is some confusion as to the initial wording but the rest of the verse reads

64 Accessed via CAL 28/09/22.

מלות כל חיא אתבע יתיה ומלות בר נשא ומלוות אחוי דבר נשא אתבע ית נפשה דבר נשא

from the presence of every living thing I will demand it (blood) and from the presence of the son of man and from the presence of the brother of the son of man I will demand the life of the son of man.

This passage is rather striking for the abundance of examples it provides, all in the emphatic singular. We may now add the equivalent translation in Cairo Geniza:

אדמכון לנפשתכון אתבוע מן יד כל חייתה אתבוע יתיה מן יד ברנשה ומן יד גבר ואחוי אתבוע ית נפשיה דברנשה

your own blood (lit. 'blood to your souls') I will demand, from the hand of every living thing I will demand it, from the hand of the son of man and from the hand of a man and his brother I will demand the life of the son of man.

This targumic translation is similar to Neofiti, although it tends to write SM as a single word and indicates the emphatic state through He rather than Aleph. Whilst Neofiti has three examples of our phrase in this verse, Cairo Geniza has two, using insteadגבר in the second instance. In verse ten the former has בר נשא as a possible reading and the latter once again ברנשה, and we can translate both 'for in an image from before the Lord he created the son of man.'

It is instructive to compare these targums to the Masoretic Text to see how they render certain Hebrew words. This reads

ואך את דמכם לנפשתיכם אדרש מיד כל חיה אדרשנו ומיד האדם מיד איש אחיו אדרש את נפש האדם

And surely your own blood I will require, from every living thing I will require it and from the hand of man, from the hand of a man and his brother I will require the life of man.

Neofiti renders two different Hebrew words with בר נשא. The first is the ubiquitous אדם with prefixed definite article, the second the common איש, and both words have a similar semantic range. Cairo Geniza renders similarly except that for איש it has גבר which focuses more on the individual. In any case, what is interesting is both Targums' determination to use SM to render these words rather than a generic noun such as אנש. Is there anything contextually which may have called forth this use? It seems clear from the above examples that SM can mean 'humankind' and this requires, in Harrison's language, the weakening of the first element בר such that it no longer carries the nuance of 'one belonging to' and the semantic weight falls on the second element נשא.[65] However, John Bowker thinks the phrase may emphasise the mortality of human beings.[66] Pointing out its similarity of Aramaic אנש and Hebrew אדם, the second of which is also used as a proper noun to denote the first human being in Genesis 2, he infers that the former may also refer to this individual.[67] If so, the Aramaic phrase may mean something like 'son of Adam' and perhaps the most significant feature of this person was his introduction of death into the world according to Genesis 3. Consequently, those characterised as 'sons of Adam,' are, by description, those subject to death.[68] And this is precisely the topic of parts of Genesis 9 which deal with the consequences of bloodshed. But as we have seen, the singular 'son of man' is used elsewhere in these Targums (e.g. Genesis 1:27 N), and Neofiti also regularly uses the plural 'son of men' (4:26), yet it is not obvious mortality is consistently being emphasised.

Helpful also is a comparison with the earlier Targum Onkelos whose text reads:

65 R. K. Harrison, "The Son of Man," *EQ* 23.1 (1951): 46-50, 48.
66 John Bowker, "The Son of Man," *JTS* 28 (1) (1977): 19-48, 35.
67 Bowker, "Son of Man," 36-37.
68 Bowker, "Son of Man," 36.

ברם ית דמכון לנפשתכון מיד כל חיתא אתבעיניה ומיד אנשא מיד גבר דישוד ית דמא דאחוהי אתבע ית נפשא דאנשא

but your own blood I will demand, from every living thing I will demand it, and from the hand of man, from the hand of a man who sheds the blood of his brother I will demand the life of man.

As we expect, this earlier text does not use SM generically, but prefers אנש and often with the emphatic state.[69] Clearly this is in marked contrast to the Palestinian Targums. To the above question, then, whether these provide examples of our phrase in the emphatic state with a generic meaning, we can answer in the affirmative.

Although potentially less significant for our purpose, it is still instructive to examine uses of SM in the absolute state. Here I will survey a few representative examples. In Neofiti Genesis 1:26 when God announces the creation of humankind he says "let us make humankind (בר נש) in our image" and in 9:6 we find

מן דשפך אדמיה דבר נש על ידי בר נש ישתפך אדמיה

whoever sheds the blood of a son of man, by the hands of a son of man will his blood be shed

In the first of these examples the use is generic as the verse refers to the creation of humankind. In the second it seems to be indefinite, denoting any individual human being.[70] Onkelos predictably uses אנשא. In Cairo Geniza we have an interesting use in Genesis 4:14 where Cain, in response to his punishment from God, says first 'behold you have driven me out today from upon the face of the ground,' and then

ומן קדמיך אדני לית אפשר לברנש למטמרה

and from before you Lord it is not possible for a son of man to hide

As we will see below, this passage has been of significance for the meaning of the phrase as used by Jesus. Postponing that discussion, however, I believe this an example of the indefinite use of SM as shown by its non emphatic state. In so using it, the speaker makes a general statement which is potentially applicable to anyone (see below).

In summary, the earliest Middle Aramaic materials have no example of generic SM but it is found once in Targum Jonathan to Isaiah. As for the later Targums, the phrase both in its emphatic and non-emphatic states can be used generically. But use of these to determine the speech of a Palestinian Jew in the first century is beset by difficulties. Apart from not knowing their dates, we also face the issue that, in large part, they are translations from a Hebrew original, meaning at times their vocabulary and grammar may be more influenced by Hebrew than Aramaic. Hence, scholars who have produced works on Aramaic and the New Testament such as Matthew Black have often placed a premium on those texts which can be considered 'natural Aramaic,' that is, Aramaic uninfluenced by a Hebrew vorlage and likely to represent what a native speaker would say. If one were to exclude the Targums from consideration, they would have to rely more on rabbinic literature which often dates from centuries after the New Testament. But is use of the Targums as problematic as it sounds? I have several observations. First, Onkelos and Jonathan, are the most extensive pieces of literature written in Middle Aramaic and form an important witness to the language at that stage. Second, it is widely agreed that in the NT period Aramaic was widely influenced by Hebrew and vice versa, such that the Hebraised Aramaic in the Targums may not be

69 Shepherd, "Resolving," 55.

70 Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (London: T&T Clark, 1992), 79, for translation.

far off so-called 'natural Aramaic.'[71] Third, it is often observed that Jesus used speech forms similar to the prophets and, further, that he may have known some of the prophetic Targums, so that he may have been directly influenced by their language.[72] Finally, the nature of some Targums as paraphrases means they often contain much 'natural Aramaic.' Therefore, although not a perfect source of information, I feel reasonably confident utilising them, and this confidence is only strengthened when we observe that, despite their date, they often prove extremely helpful in shedding light on NT and the language of Jesus (see below).

Scholarship on the 'Son of Man'

Hitherto we have focused on all the Aramaic evidence potentially relevant for our task, but I would now like to inquire into the history of scholarship on this issue.

The attempt to penetrate behind the Greek of the Gospels to an underlying Aramaic form with a different meaning goes back several centuries, but detailed work on the linguistic questions surrounding the SM started in the 19th century. Two of the most significant scholars of this era were Arnold Meyer and Julius Wellhausen who both produced works dealing with Aramaic and the Jesus traditions. In his book the former devotes a whole chapter to our phrase and considers it in light of the rabbinic phrase הוא גברא, a circumlocution referring either to the speaker or someone in the immediate context.[73] Meyer granted the titular understanding of SM by the gospel writers, but believed certain passages had a different meaning when translated back into Aramaic, among which were Mark 2:10, 28, Matthew 12:32 par. Luke 12:10.[74] Wellhausen also suggested that the Aramaic expression בר אנשא meant nothing more than humankind and should be represented in Greek by ὁ ἀνθρώπος, meaning certain passages may not originally have so specifically referred to Jesus.[75]

The 20th century, however, saw the beginning of serious attempts to work through the implications of understanding SM generically, and now we may consider the work of Geza Vermes. His first significant publication on this topic was in an appendix, the contention of which was this phrase was not a title, but simply a circumlocution for "human being."[76] Vermes begins his article with a short review of previous work on the linguistic issues and discusses such scholars as Meyer, Dalman, Campbell and Lietzmann, some of whom we have mentioned above. The bulk, however, is concerned with illustrating the different uses in various ancient Jewish writings. First, in disagreement with Dalman over the value of Onkelos and Jonathan for delineating 1st century Aramaic, he favours Neofiti, Cairo Geniza and the fragment Targum, and describes the various ways they use SM in both its emphatic and absolute states.[77] The results here are similar to those reached in my survey above, although I differ slightly in how to understand the examples in Genesis 2. He concludes this section:

> it would appear that with the exception of Gen. iv. 14… the Targums attest only the most straightforward usage of the phrase under discussion.[78]

The next section is devoted to material in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, Genesis Rabbah and the Genesis Apocryphon. From these documents also Vermes cites many instances where SM means simply 'humankind,' points to a single human being, and even is used as an indefinite pronoun with the negative particle, yielding the translation 'no one.'[79] The oldest instance of this

71 See Fitzmyer, "The Languages of Palestine," in *A Wandering Aramean.*
72 See Jeremias, *Theology,* 14-29*;* Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3rd ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 212.
73 Arnold Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache* (Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1896), 95.
74 Meyer, *Muttersprache,* 93-97.
75 Julius Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (Berlin: Reimer, 1905), 39-40.
76 Geza Vermes, "The Use of בר נשא/בר נש in Jewish Aramaic," in *Aramaic Approach.*
77 Vermes, "Use," 313, 315-16.
78 Vermes, "Use," 316.
79 Vermes, "Use," 316-318.

latter use is found in the Genesis Apocryphon 21:13 which we have already examined above.[80] But the most interesting part of Vermes' inquiry comes in the next section where he claims SM can be used as a circumlocution for the first person pronoun 'I.' Following the suggestion of Meyer, he begins by insisting on the similarity of SM to the phrase ההוא גברא which is used in situations where a speaker desires to be modest, when the speaker desires not to offend their interlocutor, in the course of cursing, and in protest.[81] The first example he cites is from Genesis Rabbah 68:12 which he translates

A certain man came to R. Jose bar Halafta and said to him, It was revealed to ההוא גברא in a dream…[82]

In this instance the speaker is clearly referring to himself, and to show the phrase can have a second person reference he cites Genesis Rabbah 100:5 which he translates:

Jacob asked Esau, What do you desire? Money or a burial place? Does ההוא גברא desire a burial place? Give me the money and take the burial place for yourself[83]

Vermes then proceeds to cite examples of SM which he believes are used in a similar manner, the first also a passage from Genesis Rabbah (7:2) which Matthew Black had previously suggested might be relevant for understanding the New Testament. Vermes translates it,

Jacob of Kefar Niburayya gave a ruling in Tyre that fish should be ritually slaughtered. Hearing this, R. Haggai sent him this order: Come and be scourged! He replied, Should בר נש be scourged who proclaims the word of scripture?[84]

In this text the one invited to be scourged also talks about a SM being scourged which suggests the latter is identified with the former and the phrase means 'I.' We could paraphrase, 'should I be scourged who proclaim the word of scripture?' Since in this passage our phrase is in the absolute state whereas the gospels suggest Jesus used a form in the emphatic state, Vermes labours to give examples of this ostensible idiom in the emphatic state. One he cites is from the Palestinian Talmud *Ket* 35a which he translates

It is said that Rabbi was buried wrapped in a single sheet because, he said, It is not as בר נשא goes that he will come again. But the Rabbis say, As בר נש goes, so will he come again.[85]

The Rabbi here responsible for the first statement rephrases 'a general principle according to which man's final state corresponds to his moral quality at the time of death,' but behind his use of SM is a veiled reference to himself which explains his actions in the first part of the passage.[86] However, probably the most significant passage he cites is one we have already considered, Genesis 4:14 in the Cairo Geniza Targum, which consists of Cain's response to God's judgement. Neofiti's version of this passage reads:

הא טרדת יתי יומא דין מעילוי אפי דארעא ומן קדמוך לית אפשר לי למטמרה ויהוי קין גלי ומטלטל בארעא ויהוי כל די יארע יתה יקטיל יתיה

Behold, this day you have driven me from the face of the land, and from before you it is not possible for me to hide, and Cain will be an exile and a wanderer on the earth and it will be that any who meets him will kill him (my translation)

80 Vermes, "Use," 318.
81 Vermes, "Use," 320.
82 Vermes, "Use," 320.
83 Vermes, "Use," 320.
84 Vermes, "Use," 321.
85 Vermes, "Use," 323.
86 Vermes, "Use," 323.

As we have seen above, the Cairo Geniza version of this passage has several differences, the most notable of which is the replacement of the first person pronoun 'me' with ברנש. In his translation of both versions Vermes italicises all pronouns to show they have the same referent, namely, Cain. In the Geniza version, since the passage mentions Cain immediately after a reference to a SM and since Neofiti has the pronoun instead, SM should be taken to represent the pronoun.[87] He comments, 'the insertion of a general statement into such a context is more than unlikely.'[88] After giving further examples he concludes by making several observations. First, like ההוא גברא there is often 'an allusion to humiliation, danger, or death' and this might hold true for the passage above where Cain is potentially humiliated by God and is facing the prospect of his death at the hands of others.[89] Second, there are no examples of SM used in a messianic sense.[90] And finally, given the expression has a number of consistent meanings throughout Aramaic sources, we should assume the Greek text of the Gospels conceals a similar idiom used by Jesus which has subsequently been transformed into a title.[91]

Vermes' article is extremely thought provoking and I now provide some observations of my own and discuss its reception by other scholars. First, this article is impressive for the amount of material collected and he has ably shown that at least in some periods of the Aramaic language SM was a common way of referring to a human being. Second, and more significantly, he may have provided an explanation for many occurrences of our phrase in the gospel tradition, and specifically in the area of synoptic parallels. In 1967 Joachim Jeremias wrote an article in which he provided a comprehensive survey of the various SM sayings and noted the interesting phenomenon that when one works through parallel Gospel logia, some of them contain our phrase and some do not.[92] For example, in Luke 12:8-9, a Q text, we find:

Now I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before people, the Son of Man will also confess him before the angels of God; but the one who denies Me before people will be denied before the angels of God (NASB).

But in the parallel Matthean version (10:32-33):

Therefore, everyone who confesses Me before people, *I* will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before people, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven (NASB).[93]

Are not examples like this possible confirmation of Vermes' observations regarding Cairo Geniza and Neofiti? If we have in these sources and also the Gospel material a similar phenomenon, does it not call for a similar explanation, namely, that SM and 'I' are interchangeable? I have several comments to make here. First, when one examines the relevant synoptic passages, not all demonstrate an interchange between SM and 'I,' a good example being Mark 9:1b par. Matthew 16:28. The former passage reads

there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God having come with power.

and the latter

there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.

87 Vermes, "Use," 322-323.
88 Vermes, "Use," 323.
89 Vermes, "Use," 327.
90 Vermes, "Use," 327-328.
91 Vermes, "Use," 328.
92 Joachim Jeremias, "Die älteste Schicht der Menschensohn Logien," *ZNW* 58 (1967): 159-172.
93 Jeremias, "älteste Schicht," 11.

However, a glance at Jeremias' examples shows the vast majority do interchange SM with the first person pronoun, so this criticism has little weight. More significant, though, is the observation that in all Gospel examples, in the Greek text, the phrase is used as a titular description of Jesus and not in the idiomatic sense Vermes espouses. Perhaps these sayings are inauthentic, but were one then to argue they supports a circumlocutional meaning of SM, he or she would be doing so on the basis of a Greek text which does not necessarily have an Aramaic original and can therefore tell us nothing about Aramaic usage.

Secondly, even though his example from these Targums has convinced Fitzmyer that here SM stands for the pronoun, I am not so convinced, but I defer this discussion until later.[94] Following this conviction, I also doubt the validity of a comparison with ההוא גברא which does consistently have a specific reference.[95] Finally, as pointed out by many, most problematic is Vermes' indiscriminate use of Aramaic material from different dates and provenances with the assumption they are equally relevant for understanding the New Testament. Admittedly he does use an example from Qumran, but at the same time neglects to consider Onkelos and Jonathan. But perhaps my criticisms reflect less a weakness in Vermes' thesis than how much scholarship has advanced since he wrote it.

After publishing his article, Vermes received plenty of negative criticism, but some also enthusiastically embraced his argument, at least in its basic approach. Notable among these was Barnabas Lindars whose work I will now summarise and critique.[96] Lindars devotes the second chapter of his book to discussing some Aramaic examples of our phrase, and, like Vermes, is critical of Dalman's contention that SM would have been unusual in everyday speech in 1st century Palestine.[97] On the other hand he rejects both Vermes' assertion that SM can ever mean 'I' and the latter's dependence on the supposedly synonymous expression ההוא גברא in making his argument.[98] Significantly, though, he agrees that SM could be used generically. On p. 19 he provides a short discussion of generic nouns and asserts

> The generic use would normally be expected to be anarthrous (*bar enash*, referring to any man). Hebrew and Aramaic, however, frequently use the generic article, where it is not suitable in English (e.g., Judg. 4:21: 'Jael… took the hammer in her hand', i.e. the one required for the job).

Unfortunately, in this statement we already encounter difficulties. The first sentence is not necessarily true. In Hebrew, collectives, which we are here calling 'generics,' are often anarthrous.[99] More difficult is his parenthetical comment where he describes *bar enash* as generic and then explains refers 'to any man,' as this seems to be an *indefinite* usage rather than a generic/collective. His second sentence is true to some extent, but the example he quotes to illustrate a generic article would seem rather to fall into the category of '*nouns definite in the imagination*.'[100] However, the most significant difficulty is his indiscriminate characterisations of Hebrew *and Aramaic* grammar and without reference to dialect or chronology. Aramaists are agreed that, while in the earlier periods of the language the emphatic state, equivalent to the Hebrew definite article, had clear functions, at a later period the distinctions between emphatic and non-emphatic began to break down. We see this already in the Dead Sea scrolls and the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan but especially with Syriac where the lexical form of a noun is equivalent to its emphatic state.[101] This could mean in Aramaic examples Lindars provides, the emphatic state has no function at all. Although mistakes and imprecisions of this sort may seem negligible, the reason I take issue with

94 Fitzmyer, "Another View," 58.
95 Jeremias, "älteste Schicht," 165.
96 Barnabas Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man* (London: SPCK, 1983).
97 Lindars, *Son of Man*, 18.
98 Lindars, *Son of Man*, 20.
99 WO, 7.2.1b.
100 WO, 13.5.1e. Italics original.
101 Takamitsu Muraoka, *Classical Syriac for Hebraists* (2nd ed.) (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2013), 20-21.

them is because they lead to inaccuracies and misrepresentation of both rabbinic sources and New Testament material later in the book.

In explicating the meaning of SM in Aramaic literature, Lindars relies primarily on four examples. The first is found in the Palestinian Talmud Ber. 5c which Lindars translates

> If *bar nash* is despised by his mother but honoured by another of his father's wives, where should he go?[102]

His interlocutor, rabbi Yohanan replies, 'he should go where he is honoured.' Rabbi Kahana, to Yohanan's exasperation, then leaves and it transpires that the initial question was relevant to Kahana's situation.[103] The form here is absolute and indefinite ("a person") rather than 'generic,' as Lindars labels it, and theoretically could apply to anyone. However, because, argues Lindars, it refers 'to *any* man in such circumstances' it has the more circumscribed meaning 'someone in my situation.'[104]

His second example, Ket. 35a, we have already quoted and discussed above. The first instance of SM in this passage is in the emphatic state and Lindars believes it renders the expression generic but in the same sense as above, pointing to 'any man in these circumstances.'[105] The passages' second usage where SM is absolute Lindars regards as more appropriate for 'an approved teaching, or ruling, of the rabbinate in general.'[106]

His third passage, also from the Palestinian Talmud (Ber. 3b) he translates as follows

> Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai said: 'If I had stood on Mount Sinai when the Torah was given to Israel, I would have asked the Merciful One to create two mouths for *bar nasha,* one for the study of the Torah and one for the provision of all his needs.'[107]

In this passage, argues Lindars, SM can not refer to all human beings since the Torah was given to Israel alone. Rather, 'it is a prayer that *anyone* would make *for himself* who was as deeply conscious of the divine generosity as Simeon himself,' and the emphatic state supposedly re-enforces this.[108] It thus means, once again, 'someone in my position.'

The last example is also from the Jerusalem Talmud (y Sheb. 38d) and the relevant section reads, according to Lindars: 'Not even a bird perishes without the will of heaven. How much less *bar nasha*.'[109] Here Rabbi Simeon is deciding whether to leave a cave in which he has hidden during the Jewish war and concludes based on the principle of the 'lesser to the greater' that it is safe to do so. Even though using a generic statement and a form of SM with a generic article, his saying applies in principle to anyone in his situation, and hence we are left with the same meaning as in the above examples.[110]

The rest of the book is concerned with the implications of this Aramaic idiom for understanding the Gospel material. His approach is to regard as having a claim to authenticity those sayings which fit the idiom, and this leaves him with nine he regards as authentic, all from either the Gospel of Mark or the Q source. The rest he considers creations of the early church who, in light of Jesus' resurrection/exaltation, identified him with the heavenly figure in Daniel 7 and ascribed to the

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102 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 20.
103 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 20.
104 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 20.
105 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 21.
106 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 21.
107 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 21.
108 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 22.
109 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 22.
110 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 22-23.

underlying Aramaic a titular sense to give the form ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου which in the Greek gospels refers exclusively to Jesus.[111]

Lindars' book is a serious attempt to wrestle with the meaning of an enigmatic phrase and he is to be commended for his attention to Aramaic sources and the possible light they shed on this issue. However, it has some serious weaknesses. As we have seen already, there is a general lack of clarity in relation to grammatical terms, but neither am I sure he has correctly interpreted his Aramaic examples. His contention is in essence that there was a special use of SM which, with or without the emphatic state, meant 'someone in my position/circumstances,' but he also asserts that the emphatic state sometimes indicates this special usage. However, if the emphatic state had uncertain significance in the Aramaic from this period, how can we be sure it had this function in these examples? Richard Bauckham has also rightly questioned whether we are here in fact dealing with an idiom. In relation to Lindars' third example, he opines,

> possession of one or two mouths is a feature of *human nature* and so his [Simeon's] prayer has to be that God would create mankind, human nature as such, with two mouths.[112]

In other words, Simeon's prayer is for all people to have this feature, but the prayer is very much directed toward his own purposes. He also notes, in contrast to Lindars' claim that SM was used in an idiom, that generic nouns (collective nouns referring to a genus) can be generic in a qualified sense and gives the English example "a man who…" where the relative clause specifies the type of person, resulting in the noun 'man' taking a different meaning from its unmodified form.[113] Even though I would characterise this usage as 'indefinite,' the point still stands. In applying his understanding to the New Testament, Lindars makes some interesting suggestions but unfortunately is mistaken at several points. For example, in discussing the Q passage concerned with the 'sign of Jonah' (Luke 11:30 par. Matthew 12:40), he comments,

> Just as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, i.e., bore witness to God through his preaching to them, so there is a man who will be a sign to the present generation.[114]

But if the usage is here 'generic' as Lindars claims, why does he use the indefinite article 'a' in his explanation? Perhaps, as has been suggested, Lindars has in mind the generic sense illustrated by 1 Samuel 17:34 above, but Lindars has not distinguished this from the properly generic/collective use, nor demonstrated its existence in Aramaic of the right time period, nor shown its explanatory potential when applied to this passage. I shall have more to say below about the approach of Lindars and kindred scholars.

In critiquing Lindars, Richard Bauckham somewhat developed his own argument as to the meaning of SM. In contrast, he contends that SM in the original Aramaic is best understood *indefinitely* so that it is non-specific in its reference.[115] This is partly in reaction to Lindars' argument which ends up explaining most of the NT examples in this manner yet labelling them 'generic.' Jesus, so the argument goes, could have used this expression in a 'specific indefinite' sense 'a son of man,' to use the wording of WO, meaning he referred to a particular person but was not explicit about who this was. The implication, of course, is that he himself is the referent.[116] Such an elusive manner of speaking then allowed Jesus to characterise this figure in multiple ways including having the ability to forgive sins (Mark 2:10), to pronounce on lawful Sabbath behaviour (Mark 2:28), and the prerogative of acting as God's representative in judgement (Luke 12:8).[117] He then left his hearers

111 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 26.
112 Richard Bauckham, "The Son of Man: 'A Man in my Position' or 'Someone'?", *JSNT* 23 (1985): 23-33, 24, italics original.
113 Bauckham, "The Son of Man," 25.
114 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 41.
115 Bauckham, "Son of Man," 29.
116 Bauckham, "Son of Man," 30-31; WO, 13.2a, although Bauckham does not use this terminology.
117 Bauckham, "Son of Man," 31.

to decide for themselves about his own status and identity, a practice of the historical Jesus 'for which there is abundant evidence.'[118] Bauckham's argument is interesting and would certainly fit what we know about Jesus' speech idiosyncrasies, but does it ultimately persuade? Unfortunately I think not. The single significant difficulty with this thesis, as others have pointed out, is that it fails to take seriously the Greek form ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου which is so consistently definite.[119] Surely, if Jesus had consistently used the indefinite form בר אנש we would find this reflected in the Greek? But the indefinite form υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου is conspicuous by its absence, except in John 5:27. Of course, this also requires one to believe the emphatic state had lost its force in 1st century CE Aramaic, but as we have seen from Qumran, Onkelos and Jonathan, there is no evidence for this having taken place with our phrase.

Lindars and Bauckham have both produced valuable contributions to the Son of Man debate and they must be take seriously. However, overall neither provide convincing explanations of either the Aramaic or New Testament data. Let us now consider the final significant scholar who takes this general approach. I refer, of course, to Maurice Casey who produced a number of works on SM. His magnum opus, however, was his 2009 book *The Solution to the Son of Man Problem* and to this primarily I will make reference in what follows.[120] In the first chapter Casey reviews previous scholarly work, starting with the early church fathers and ending in the present day. He observes that throughout most of church history SM has unsurprisingly been interpreted as a title for Jesus, but with the Enlightenment and the rise of historical-critical scholarship some began to question this assumption.[121] Reviewing the work of such scholars as Meyer, Wellhausen and Lindars, Casey places himself in the same camp, believing that the tendency to interpret this phrase as a title is incorrect, and that it actually conceals an Aramaic idiom.[122]

In chapter two Casey discusses the use of SM in Aramaic literature, but he first attempts to demonstrate the stability of the Aramaic language through time, for if this be so, the argument goes, we may be justified in using later Aramaic texts to illuminate the New Testament. His evidence consists of linguistic features such as אב and בין and the use of the participle in narrative which occur in both early and late texts.[123] Significantly, the phrase בר אנש is one such consistent feature and is found both in, for example, the Sefire inscriptions (8th century BCE) and the later Targums (post 200 CE).[124] Next, Casey shows that in many instances we must rely on later texts in order to understand NT, pointing, for example, to a rare instance, in Mark 5:41, where we have the words of Jesus quoted in the original Aramaic: Ταλιθα κουμ which represents the טליתא קומי "little girl, rise."[125] In this short clause, there are two features which can be explained only by reference to later Aramaic texts, the first of which is the initial word in the emphatic state used as a vocative. Its lexical form is טליה and, as Casey notes, it does not occur in the Dead Sea scrolls or earlier, but only in later texts such as Targum Neofiti (Deuteronomy 22:16). Yet no one would for this reason deny Jesus could have used this word.[126] The second feature is the writing of the imperative verb for which we would expect κουμι, with the final iota representing the feminine, singular Yod suffix. Once again, when we turn to a later dialect, this time Syriac, we find a consistent quiescing of the final syllable (see Muraoka), meaning the Greek form is a phonetic spelling of the Aramaic and does not represent its actual morphology.[127] Nonetheless, we could not have gleaned this information from Middle Aramaic.

118 Bauckham, "Son of Man," 30-31.
119 See Hurtado, *Who is this Son of Man?*
120 Maurice Casey, *The Solution to the 'Son of Man' Problem* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).
121 Casey, *Solution*, e.g. 1-2.
122 Casey, *Solution*, 20-22.
123 Casey, *Solution*, 56.
124 Casey, *Solution*, 57.
125 Casey, *Solution*, 57.
126 Casey, *Solution*, 57.
127 Muraoka, *Syriac*, 94; Casey, *Solution*, 57.

Having thus demonstrated the potential explanatory value of later texts, Casey examines the use of the emphatic state, and in contrast to Lindars, he is more careful in his descriptions. In agreement with all leading Aramaists, he notes the breakdown of distinction between states in some dialects and time periods, Syriac being the most obvious, but does not make this the centrepiece of his argument.[128] Rather, he observes the emphatic state is optional in generic expressions and with certain unique nouns like 'earth.'[129] In illustration of the former he gives the example רשיעא 'the wicked' in the proverbs of Ahiqar which, as we have seen, has an analogue in the Hebrew הרשע; and of the latter an example of fluctuation between שמיא lit. 'the heavens' and שמין in an Aramaic letter.[130] More significantly for the New Testament, Casey demonstrates this in the Dead Sea scrolls, for example, the Targum of Job 30:6 translating the Hebrew ים by ימא lit 'the sea.'

Using this as background information, he goes on to consider the phrase בר אנש which he argues exhibits the same phenomenon, but likewise with no discernable change in meaning. He asserts further that in all the extant texts SM means nothing more than 'humankind/being,' and proceeds to illustrate this from nineteen examples taken from writings of various dates and times.[131] Some of his examples are not found in Vermes' essay such as Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Exodus 31:14:

כל מאן דיעבד עיבידתא וישתיצי בר נשא ההוא מעמיה

which Casey translates

...whoever does work on it, that (son of) man shall be destroyed from his people.[132]

Also Targum Jonathan to Jeremiah 51:43:

ארעא לא יתיב בה כל אנש ולא יעבר בה בר אנש

… a land in which no man lives, and which no son of man passes through.[133]

Casey, like Lindars, also contends that SM can be used in a more restrictive sense so that it refers not to all humankind but to a subset thereof, and in this connection he quotes a passage from one of John of Dalyatha's letters 49:13 which he translates:

After this transformation, there follows another transformation in which fire clothes the (son of) man from the soles of his feet up to his brain, so that when the (son of) man looks at himself he does not see his composite body, but only the fire with which he is clothed.[134]

He then comments 'This is part of an account of an experience of ascetic visionaries, not part of the normal experience of everyone,' and hence it seems, as above, we have an example of a qualified generic usage.[135] This section of the book is uncontroversial, for it is clear that throughout the sources SM has the rather banal meaning 'humankind/being' even if sometimes in a qualified sense. In the next section, however, Casey works out in detail his special thesis, namely, that throughout Aramaic literature we find an idiom 'whereby a speaker might use a general statement containing the term בר (א)נש(א) to say something about himself, or himself and others, or about whoever was clearly from the context, particularly in mind.'[136] The next 33 texts are designed to demonstrate this usage. As an example of the third usage in the quote, Casey cites Targum Neofiti to Exodus 33:20

128 Casey, *Solution*, 59.
129 Casey, *Solution*, 59.
130 Casey, *Solution*, 59.
131 Casey, *Solution*, 61.
132 Casey, *Solution*, 65.
133 Casey, *Solution*, 64.
134 Casey, *Solution*, 63.
135 Casey, *Solution*, 63.
136 Casey, *Solution*, 67.

לא תכל למחמי אפי ארום לית אפשר דחמי יתי בר נש וייחי

You are not able to see my face, for it is not possible for a son of man to see me and live.[137]

Here the general statement at the end of the sentence is applied in particular to Moses but clearly has no reference to the speaker, God. Casey then uses y. Ber 3b which we have already quoted above in illustration of the second usage in the above quote, arguing that SM here refers not to all humankind but a subset in which Simeon includes himself and anyone else in his position.[138] To demonstrate the first usage in the above quote he refers, for example, to the Cairo Geniza fragment to Genesis 4:14 which we have already discussed above. Here I agree with Casey's exegesis over against Vermes for it makes more sense for Cain to be making a general statement which by implication refers to himself, than for SM to mean 'I.'[139]

After demonstrating that SM was not a title for a known eschatological figure in second century Judaism, Casey turns his attention to the New Testament material where he finds a number of examples of our phrase which he considers to align with the idiom he has established in Aramaic literature and therefore are to be considered authentic utterances of Jesus. The majority of these are from Mark and Q and I will now illustrate using several of Casey's examples. He sees an example of this idiom in Mark 9:11-13:[140]

And they were asking him, saying 'why are the scribes saying it is necessary for Elijah to come first?' And he was saying to them, 'Elijah having come first, turns back all, and how it is written concerning the son of man that he must suffer much and be rejected? But I say to you that Elijah has come and they did to him as much as they wanted, as it is written concerning him.'

Casey here argues that the passage throughout concerns John the baptist rather than Jesus, SM being generic in the underlying Aramaic and hence applicable to anyone. This would then be an example of the phrase being used of someone other than the speaker.[141] Another example he sees in Mark 10:45 which Casey, on the basis of his reconstructed Aramaic text, translates 'What is more, a/the son of man does not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life/soul/self as a ransom for many.'[142] Disagreeing with the traditional interpretation which sees here Jesus' teaching about the atoning value of his death, he believes Jesus, in response to the request of James and John (10:37), to be asserting not only the atoning value of his own death but those of these disciples who he believed would become martyrs with him. Such an interpretation is only possible if SM here is generic and includes both the speaker and addressees.[143]

Another significant example of Casey's is Mark 2:10-11 which, again on the basis of his reconstruction, he translates

And so that you may know that a/the son of man has power/authority on earth to forgive/undo/release sins, 'Get up, I tell you, take up your mattress and go to your house.'[144]

This statement comes in a passage concerned with Jesus' healing of a paralytic, and the Greek text, assuming SM to be a title apparently assigns high authority to Jesus. Casey, on the other hand, considers the SM saying to be a general statement about the ability of at least a subset of humankind

137 Casey, *Solution*, 78, my translation.
138 Casey, *Solution*, 68.
139 Casey, *Solution*, 77.
140 Casey, *Solution*, 125.
141 Casey, *Solution*, 125-131.
142 Casey, *Solution*, 132.
143 Casey, *Solution*, 131-134.
144 Casey, *Solution*, 145.

to forgive sin on God's behalf. Jesus, by implication, then applies this statement to himself to justify his activity.[145]

The corollary of Casey's contention that SM was only ever used in an idiomatic sense is that any SM saying which does not fit this idiom is regarded a creation of the early church. Thus in the remaining few chapters Casey combs through the Gospel material, dismissing as inauthentic a large number of sayings which are used in a titular sense, often allude to Daniel 7 and appear to present Jesus as occupying a unique position in God's kingdom (chapters 10-12).

Evaluation

First of all, what is the implication of the Aramaic evidence we surveyed in section 1? Does it support the claim that Jesus could have used SM idiomatically? Admittedly, I have often found it difficult to decide. If we restrict ourselves to Middle Aramaic texts, the reality is we only have one example of SM used generically, and still not in any idiomatic sense that Casey's argument would require. It seems rather dubious to base a whole theory on one example, and even more so when this example apparently arose from a literal translation of a Hebrew text already containing בן אדם. Middle Aramaic, then, seems to point away from the idiomatic interpretation. However, if Kaufman and others are correct in their assessment of the Palestinian Targums' value, and if, as Vermes has pointed out, even late texts from the Talmud often quote rabbinic sayings from several centuries earlier, perhaps we have more evidence for the idiomatic understanding.[146] Nevertheless, these texts are not demonstrably early and I feel it appropriate to prioritise Middle Aramaic. But most importantly, we must test the Aramaic data against the witness of the NT.

I would now like to provide a critique of Casey's work, but many of my criticisms will apply equally to Vermes and Lindars. First, has Casey accurately represented the Aramaic sources? He claims to have isolated an idiom, but here I entertain some doubts. It seems potentially a common feature of any language to make generic statements which might be applicable to oneself. For example, in English someone might say 'what is one to do' in an uncertain situation, and several scholars have also pointed out Paul's reference to himself in the third person in 2 Corinthians 12:2: 'I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven...'[147] But is this really to be considered an idiom and not rather a manner of speaking typical of many languages? Let us assume, however, that he has indeed identified an idiom and consider the NT texts against it. Here we encounter difficulty, for despite his insistence to the contrary, in most cases the application of this understanding to the NT is only possible with great difficulty and awkwardness. Consider, for example, the Q saying found in Luke 7:33-34 (par. Matt. 11:18-19):

> For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' (ESV)

Casey argues that in the second sentence Jesus makes a generic statement about humankind, 'man comes eating and drinking,' which can only be so translated if Casey "repoints" the verbs in the putative Aramaic text as participles rather than perfects.[148] Assuming this, which itself is extremely speculative, Casey argues Jesus can then apply such a statement to himself.[149] But how is eating food and drinking water relevant to the accusation that Jesus was a glutton and drunkard? John the baptist also did these things, yet the accusation levelled against him was different. It may be answered that the statement 'SM came eating and drinking' implies drinking wine and eating gluttonously, but then it is no longer a generic statement about humankind, rather a specific one

145 Casey, *Solution,* 164-165.
146 Vermes, "Use," 327.
147 J. Y. Campbell, "The Origin and Meaning of the Term Son of Man," *JTS* vol. 48 (191/192) (1947): 145-155, 152.
148 Casey, *Solution,* 136-137.
149 Casey, *Solution,* 137-138.

about Jesus! One can not have it both ways. This is in marked contrast to the Aramaic texts Casey cites where it is obvious what relevance the generic statement has. For example, in the Cairo Geniza Targum to Genesis 4:14 it is not possible for Cain to hide because no one ('a son of man') can, and in Targum Neofiti to Exodus 33:20 Moses can not see God's face and live because, again, no one can. A further difficulty is that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is explicated later in the sentence as lit. 'a man (ἄνθρωπος), a glutton and a drunkard...' with ἄνθρωπος in apposition to ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου and thereby implying a close grammatical and semantic relationship. Since ἄνθρωπος would be modifying a generic statement, it should also itself make a generic statement about humankind, but this is manifestly not the case. It rather refers specifically to Jesus and his behaviour, but such specificity, seen also in the past tense of the verbs, can be found in none of Casey's Aramaic examples. Moreover, as is widely recognised, the saying takes the form of antithetical parallelism, a common technique in Hebrew poetry, which is used to contrast John the Baptist and Jesus. The former does not 'eat bread and drink wine' but the latter 'eats and drinks.' Perhaps one might say the latter phrase is non specific since it lacks the direct objects and hence appropriate for a generic statement, but in reply such ellipsis is exactly what we expect in Hebrew poetry, and additionally the phrase must imply the direct objects to call forth the accusation that follows. We could paraphrase this 'John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine… The SM has come eating [bread] and drinking [wine]*...'* In essence, the saying seems very much to be referring to an individual, and Matthew Black nicely summarises: 'to attempt to read a communal meaning into the expression does violence to the whole context.'[150]

Other Gospel texts likewise do not yield to Casey's explanations. For example, he takes Mark 10:45 to be a reference to the atoning deaths of himself and his disciples, but once again, to make the statement generic requires him to "re-point" the Aramaic verbs. More significantly, Casey does not discuss the relation of this passage to Jesus' words at the last supper, where he also interprets his death sacrificially. Admittedly, there are some passages which do yield more easily, such as Mark 2:27-28. The first verse makes the general statement 'the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath' and v. 28 follows as a logical inference: 'therefore (ὥστε) the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.' A generic reference, then, is apparently required. However, even this passage can be explained in other ways. Robert Stein, for instance, believes that in describing himself as 'Lord of the Sabbath' Jesus is ascribing to himself a unique authority such as only belongs to God, and whether or not one agrees with this exegesis, it does at least show there are other interpretive possibilities.[151]

Another difficulty of Casey but also Lindars and Vermes' views is, in my opinion, a failure to take seriously the Greek form of the Gospel sayings. Peter Williams has pointed out that the presence of Greek-speaking Jews in 1st century Palestine, makes it likely Jesus' sayings would have been discussed and interpreted in Greek from the outset and not simply when they were translated from Aramaic.[152] It perhaps assumes too literary a model for the transmission of the Gospel material, as if all the evangelists or their sources possessed were obscure Aramaic documents which they were tasked with translating and interpreting. On the contrary, as recent studies have shown, the preservation of Jesus' words and deeds was likely a complex process involving the original eye-witnesses as guarantors of the tradition, and we should, then, take very seriously the Greek form of the Gospels as the best sources we have and an authoritative witness to the meaning of Jesus' sayings.[153] When, therefore, all four Gospels attest that SM should be understood as a direct, definite reference to Jesus, and this by people closer than us to Jesus linguistically, culturally and temporally, this should take precedence over other theories, unless there are exceptionally good grounds to reject it.

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150 Black, *Aramaic Approach,* 329.

151 Robert Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 149.

152 Peter Williams, "Expressing Definiteness in Aramaic: A Response to Casey's Theory Concerning the Son of Man Sayings," in *'Who is this Son of Man?,* 68-69.

153 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

Another significant point which has often been neglected by scholars is Jesus' failure to use the phrase in circumstances where he is not the referent. If SM were a common, general expression, as Casey affirms, then we would expect it to occur more often and in relation to other people. Why, for example, does Jesus not begin more of his parables 'a/the son of man was.../'there was a certain son of man'? Instead, throughout the Gospels we find ἄνθρωπος which is semantically close to איש in Hebrew and אנש in Aramaic. At this point Casey would counter that the translators of the Aramaic material employed a translation strategy, a known linguistic phenomenon whereby a translator decides to render something consistently. He gives the example of Aquila consistently translating the Hebrew object marker את with συν + accusative.[154] In approaching the SM material he argues the translators decided to translate בר אנשא literally every time it referred, by implication, to Jesus but idiomatically as ἄνθρωπος when to others. The original meaning, he avers, is not thereby lost but is just about recoverable from the Greek phrase if one understands the articles generically. This then allowed the translators to remain faithful to the original meaning while promoting their view of Jesus' uniqueness. Casey is to be commended for his utilisation of other disciplines, but I do not find this convincing. Unless all the Aramaic material was translated into Greek at a very early stage, is it likely all the Gospel writers or their sources would use the same translation strategy? If there was peculiarity in the Greek, maybe this reflects the situation in the Aramaic. Furthermore, Middle Aramaic sources tend to formulate generic statements using אנש or a form of בני אנש which agrees with the Gospels' use of ἄνθρωπος and even τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, the Greek semantic equivalents. Many years ago, this was argued by Gustaf Dalman and most of his points in this regard still stand.[155] Another issue on the level of the Greek text is that when Casey, Lindars and Vermes encounter Gospel material that does not fit their theory, they reject it as inauthentic. As we saw above, this leads to discarding a plethora of SM sayings, and is highly dubious methodologically.[156] As far as I am concerned, when multiple sources attest Jesus believed in some sort of heavenly SM who would represent God and be responsible for judging the world, I am inclined to take it as a genuine historical memory.

The above works we have reviewed are often brilliantly argued and in many ways make significant contributions to the study of the historical Jesus and the NT in general. However, their theories are difficult to square with Middle Aramaic and the impression gained from reading the Gospels that in using the phrase Jesus was referring to a particular individual. I therefore conclude this section by stating my conviction that Vermes, Lindars, Casey and other scholars of their ilk are in fact mistaken.

Part Two

In our discussion above I focused primarily on Aramaic material and only discussed briefly some of the NT passages to which the idiomatic theory of SM have been applied. I would like now to examine one of these in more detail and make several suggestions as to its interpretation.

I will proceed by providing detailed grammatical and lexical comment on the selected passage, and then attempt to translate it back into Aramaic. However, since this process relies on several presuppositions I would here like to register caution. First, it assumes Jesus spoke Aramaic as his primary language, which has been disputed. However, given that it was the primary language of Palestine in the first century, that the verbatim quotations of Jesus in the Gospels are Aramaic (e.g. Mark 5:41, Matthew 27:46) and that the Greek more often reflects Aramaic rather than Hebrew syntax and vocabulary, I feel it a safe assumption. Second, it assumes we have a sufficient knowledge of Aramaic from the relevant time period.[157] And third, it necessarily involves a degree of conjecture.

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154 Casey, *Solution,* 253.
155 Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus* (trans. D. M. Kay) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 238.
156 Paul Owen, "Problems with Casey's "Solution," in *Who is this Son of Man?,* 38.
157 Williams, "Expressing Definiteness," 67.

These last two criticisms I fully endorse and they make me sceptical about our ability to retro-translate all the Gospel material. However, we have a fairly good knowledge of Middle Aramaic and this will be my primary basis for making careful reconstructions of biblical passages. I will only attempt to reconstruct passages which give evidence of being literal translations from Aramaic, and I will attempt to stay as close to the Greek text as possible.[158]

The passage I will examine is the so called "unforgivable sin" logion, which is found in all three synoptics (Mark 3:28-29; Matthew 12:31-32; Luke 12:10). I have chosen this text for several reasons. First, it has a good claim to authenticity as suggested by the fact that it is multiply attested, dissimilar from the early church's teaching about the universality of forgiveness, and, as we shall see, reflects Semitic idiom. In my view, the attempts by several scholars to argue it is the creation of an early Christian prophet are unconvincing.[159] Second, it uses the phrase 'Son of Man' in a manner which is difficult to understand. As the base text I will use Mark, and then comment on how Matthew and Luke's versions relate to it. The Greek text of Mark 3:28-29 is as follows:

Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πάντα ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ αἱ βλασφημίαι ὅσα ἐὰν βλασφημήσωσιν· ὃς δ' ἂν βλασφημήση εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ ἔνοχός ἐστιν αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος.

Truly I say to you, all things will be forgiven the sons of men, the sins and the blasphemies, as much as they blaspheme. But whoever blasphemes against the holy spirit does not have forgiveness forever, but is guilty of an eternal sin (my translation).

The introductory formula consists of the ubiquitous present, active, indicative of the verb to "speak" followed by the dative of the indirect object.[160] Preceding this is the emphatic adverb ἀνήν with which an author asserts the truth of a statement as, for example, in 1 Corinthians 14:16, 'Otherwise, when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an enquirer, say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying?' As many scholars have noted, however, the placement of the adverb before pronouncements of Jesus is unusual and seems designed to lend the saying special authority.[161] The particle ὅτι here introduces the discourse which functions as the grammatical object of the verb λέγω.

Such discourse begins with the neuter plural inclusive adjective πάντα which serves as the subject of the following singular verb, such number incongruence seemingly designed to stress the entirety of the subject.[162] The main verb of this dependent clause is the future, passive, indicative, singular of ἀφίημι. As appears often in Jesus teaching, the passive voice, or "divine passive," seems to be a circumlocution for God designed to avoid making direct mention of him and thereby protect his honour.[163] One could thus paraphrase "God will forgive all things..."[164] Although it could be a logical future as some commentators note, it is more likely referring to a future event, namely the judgement in which God either forgives sins or holds people accountable.[165] The verb has great semantic flexibility and according to BDAG can mean, for example, "dismiss" as when Jesus dismisses the crowds (Matt. 13:36); "leave," e.g. Matthew 4:11 when the Devil leaves Jesus; and "allow" such as when Jesus does not allow the former demoniac to come with him in Mark 5:19.[166]

158 I here follow the suggestions in Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 107-110.
159 E.g. Robin Scroggs, "The Exaltation of the Spirit by Some Early Christians," *JBL* 84 (4) (1965): 359-373.
160 Wallace, *Greek Grammar,* 140.
161 W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and rev. by W. F. Gingrich and F. W. Danker; 3rd ed.), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 53.
162 Wallace, *Greek Grammar,* 399.
163 Jeremias, *Theology,* 9.
164 Jeremias, *Theology,* 9.
165 Robert Gundry, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 176.
166 BDAG, 156-157.

In our passage, however, the verb quite clearly falls into BDAG's second group of meanings which denotes "release from moral obligation or consequence.[167] One example which also takes the direct object "sins" is found in Luke 5:20 where Jesus says to the paralysed man "man, your sins are forgiven (ἀφέωνταί) you," another, although without a direct object, being Peter's question to Jesus in Matthew 18:21 "Lord, how many times should I forgive (ἀφήσω) my brother when he sins against me?" It is something both God and humans can do, but in Mark 3:28 it clearly refers to the former.

The succeeding phrase "to the sons of men" is either a dative of advantage, or reference/respect.[168] It is determinate and a way of referring to the whole of humankind, the second article in the construction being generic. The following phrase is compound and contains two plural nouns. The first is the neuter plural of ἁμάρτημα, the -μα termination of which indicates the result of an action.[169] A literal translation, then, would yield "sins committed." In Koine Greek, however, the various morphological distinctions between words sometimes lost their force, meaning we can not rely too heavily on morphology. A glance at the other NT uses of this noun, therefore, will be useful. In Romans 3:25 Paul refers to the "sins committed beforehand" which seems to point to individual acts rather than sin in the abstract. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 6:18, when Paul teaches the Corinthians that "every sin which a person may commit is outside the body," he is clearly referring to sinful acts. The termination thus still likely retains its force in this passage. The second noun in the compound noun phrase is βλασφημία which is cognate with the verb βλασφημέω which itself means "to speak in a disrespectful way that demeans, denigrates, maligns."[170] The noun unsurprisingly has a similar meaning and is used multiple times in the New Testament. It can denote speech against God such as, for instance, when the high priest accuses Jesus of blaspheming, using both the verb and the noun: 'then the high priest tore his garments saying "he has blasphemed; why do we need any more witnesses? See now, you have heard the blasphemy (βλασφημίαν)!"' In this passage, along with others like Mark 2:7, the noun is apparently used for action where an individual assumes rights which properly belong to God. But it also appears when slander in general is meant and which may be directed towards humans and/or God. This is particularly the case when βλασφημία is used in vice lists (e.g. Mark 7:22, Col. 3:8) where it occurs together with crimes such as murder and theft.[171] Some scholars have attempted to argue that in our passage the noun, in contrast to ἁμάρτημα which supposedly describes sins against fellow human beings, means specifically slander against God.[172] However, unlike the above mentioned passages, there does not seem to be anything in the context to indicate such specificity. I think it here likely to be synonymous with ἁμάρτημα, although perhaps focusing slightly more on sins of speech. Since there is grammatical agreement between them, it is possible that the earlier πάντα could modify this phrase, thus producing "all sins and blasphemies may be forgiven..." But this seems unlikely given the amount of space that would separate the phrase from its adjectival modifier. With many commentators, then, I prefer to understand the phrase as in apposition to πάντα, serving to clarify and specify it.[173]

The following word is the neuter plural of the adjective ὅσος which expresses quantity and modifies both of the preceding nouns. This is followed by the contingency particle ἐὰν which is here equivalent to ἄν and serves to underline the indefiniteness of the construction.[174] Such indefiniteness requires the use of the subjunctive which is here the cognate verb βλασφημέω.[175] The construction seems to involve a form of cognate accusative (see below). To bring out the meaning

167 BDAG, 156.
168 Wallace, *Greek Grammar,* 144, 144-146 respectively.
169 F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and rev. R. W. Funk) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 109.
170 BDAG, 178.
171 BDAG, in loc.
172 E.g. Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (WBC) (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), in loc.
173 Guelich *Mark,* in loc.
174 BDAG, 729.
175 Wallace, *Greek Grammar,* 478.

we could paraphrase: 'all the sins and blasphemies which any person might have ever committed...', and so ends v. 38.

V. 39 sets up a contrast with v. 38 by beginning with the postpositive adversative conjunction δέ. Although it does not always imply a contrast, the context here clearly indicates that one is intended.[176] A relative clause then follows which functions as the grammatical subject of the sentence. The verb βλασφημέω is used once again in the subjunctive mood but this time in the singular number, thereby pointing to any hypothetical individual who would perform such an action. Because the 'holy spirit' is what is affected by the action, the verb should be understood in its narrower sense of speaking against God.[177] The verb is modified by the preposition εἰς which here means 'against' and takes the object τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον.[178] The adjectival phrase is in the second attributive position which according to Robertson, quoted by Wallace, assigns emphasis to both the noun and adjective, the latter added in apposition.[179] With Casey, I believe this phrase should be understood as a metaphor for God in action for this is how it is used in the Hebrew Bible as, for instance, in 1 Samuel 11:6 where the spirit of god rushes upon Saul, turning him into a mighty warrior.[180] Following is the main verb of the sentence which is negated by οὐκ and takes the direct object ἄφεσιν which is a nominal form of the verb ἀφίημι. Its termination assigns it to the class of abstract nouns, and its meaning is similar to the verbal form (e.g. Matthew 26:28).[181] It is modified by the adverbial phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα which is also used in classical Greek and expresses the idea of eternity.[182] In the New Testament it seems to have both a relative and absolute sense. As an example of the former we could cite Matthew 21:19 where Jesus curses the fig tree with the words "may fruit never again (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) come from you." Clearly he is saying nothing about how long the fig tree will last and the phrase seems rather to be a way of saying "no longer/never."[183] An example of the latter, however, would be John 6:51 where Jesus says "if anyone eats this bread they will live forever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα)," a passage which apparently does envisage everlasting life.[184] In our passage the meaning is more akin to Matthew 21:19 and is used in the sense of "never."

Another clause follows which is headed by the strong adversative conjunction ἀλλὰ, used to provide a contrast with something in the preceding discourse. Its usage is illuminated by, for example, Matthew 5:17 where Jesus affirms that he has "not come to destroy the Law and Prophets, but (ἀλλὰ) to fulfil them." To what is this clause contrasted? Given the idea of condemnation/sin in the final clause ("guilty of an eternal sin"), it seems to contrast with the aforementioned idea of forgiveness ("whoever blasphemes against the holy spirit will not *be forgiven*"); to paraphrase, "instead of having forgiveness they will be..." The subject of the clause is contained in the copula verb ἐστιν and picks up the subject within the relative clause at the beginning of the sentence: "whoever… he/she will..." The predicate is then formed by the adjective ἔνοχός which takes the genitive phrase αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος as its complement. The sense of this phrase is not entirely clear and there are several ways of understanding it. In the New Testament the adjective ἔνοχός can take a genitive or dative complement, or the preposition εἰς. This latter use is found in Matthew 5:22c where according to BDAG it is a brachylogy for "*guilty enough to go into the hell of fire."*[185] With the dative it can mean "liable" i.e. denoting the punishment to which one is subject as a result of their actions (Matt. 5:22, "liable to judgement"), and "answerable" as in Matthew 5:22, indicating "the tribunal" before which one must give an account for their actions.[186] More relevant, however, is the genitive use which can be used in the following ways: (1) "*subject to"* as Hebrews

176 BDAG, 213.
177 For subjunctive see Wallace, *Greek Grammar,* 478.
178 BDAG, 290.
179 BDAG, 306.
180 Casey, *Solution,* 140.
181 BDF, 109; BDAG, 155.
182 BDAG, 32.
183 C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 141.
184 BDAG, 32.
185 BDAG, 339.
186 BDAG, 339.

2:15 attests, which references Christ freeing all those "subject to slavery (ἔνοχοι… δουλείας)"; (2) to indicate the one who commits a crime against someone else, for example, 1 Corinthians 11:27 "guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Christ"; (3) like one of the dativa l usages, to mean "deserving of," as in Matthew 26:66 ("deserving of death"); (4) "guilty of" where the genitive denotes the crime committed.[187]

From the above usages it appears the term often has legal connotations since it appears, for example, in reference to the Sanhedrin and, by implication, to the judgement of God. Given Hebrews 2:15 does not fit this so clearly, it would seem we can exclude "subject to" as the meaning in Mark 3:29. The second genitive usage also does not fit our passage, for the idea of sinning against eternal sin/punishment makes no sense. This leaves us with options 3 and 4. The idea of being sentenced to eternal condemnation makes sense and Cranfield accordingly follows a variant text which reads κρίσεως.[188] But this only highlights the difficulty of taking the phrase ἔνοχός... ἁμαρτήματος in this sense. As we saw above, the termination of the second word means it refers to an action, and this suggests option 4 is the most plausible: "guilty of an eternal sin." What this likely means is, to quote Guelich, 'a sinful act with "eternal consequences."'[189]

Moving from the Greek text to its vorlage, it is immediately obvious this text contains a number of Semitisms, which suggest the saying goes back to the earliest Aramaic speaking communities and probably to Jesus himself. The first of these is the adverb ἀνήν, a transliteration of the Hebrew adverb אמן which is used in a manner similar to the Greek.[190] The Aramaic language, however, adopted this word and it is found in several Middle Aramaic texts.[191] For example, in Targum Onkelos to Deuteronomy, in the section dealing with covenant curses we read ליט דיקלי אבוהי ואמיה ויימר כל עמא אמן, translated 'cursed is anyone who dishonours their father and mother, and all the people shall say, "amen,"' expressing their agreement with the curse. The placement before an utterance, however, was likely an innovation of Jesus.[192] Secondly, as is well known, the verb ἀφίημι, when coordinated with either its logical subject or indirect object in the dative, depending on the verb's voice, resembles an Aramaic construction using שבק + ל, the second element indicating those to whom the verbal action is directed. While it is typically collocated with חוב "debt," the Aramaic metaphor for sin, it is also used with חטא "sin" as in 11Q*Targum of Job*, 38:2-3: ושבק להון חטאיהון בדילה, 'he forgave them their sins on account of him.' However, I do not claim it specifically as an Aramaism. Third, the dative of reference "sons of men," which would have taken ל in the original, is also a Semitism and, as we saw above, is used at Qumran for humankind collectively. Fourth, the noun βλασφημία modified by ὅσα which in some constructions functions virtually as a relative pronoun (see BDAG p...), and then followed by its cognate verb, seems to be a form of cognate accusative common in Hebrew and Aramaic.[193] To cite an example from Qumran, in 1Q*Genesis Apocryphon* 22:12 we find the phrase וכול שביתא די שבאו, translated literally 'and all the captivity which they had taken captive.' Fifth, the verb βλασφημέω usually takes a direct object in the accusative but here it is followed by the preposition εἰς, giving us the awkward translation "blaspheme against." However, it seems to conceal a construction known in Hebrew but more common in Aramaic where the direct object is indicated by the equivalent preposition ל.[194] Finally, the two halves of this saying, verses 28, 29 respectively, are strictly speaking in contradiction, for if everything can be forgiven, that includes the sin against the holy spirit. But this is said to be unforgivable. Therefore we have here a type of 'relative' or 'dialectical' negation, used in Semitic languages, in which a general statement is made in absolute terms, only to be followed by an

187 BDAG, 338 for all these uses.
188 Cranfield, *Mark,* 141.
189 Guelich, *Mark,* 180.
190 Holladay, *Lexicon,* in loc.
191 Jeremias, *Theology,* 7-8.
192 Jeremias, *Theology,* 35-36.
193 BDAG, in loc.; Guelich, *Mark,* 167.
194 WO, in loc.; Holladay, *Lexicon,* 410.

exception.[195] As an example Guelich cites Exodus 12:10: 'do not leave any of it till morning, but what remains of it till morning you must burn in the fire' (my translation).[196]

Since this passage gives abundant evidence of being a literal translation of an Aramaic logion, I will now attempt my own retro-translation:

אמן אמר אנה להון די כל ישתבקון לבני אנשא חטאיא וגדפיא די גדפו ברם מן דיגדף לרוחא קדישתא לא איתי לה שבקו לעלמא אלהן חיב חיוב עלמא

truly I am saying to you that all can be forgiven to the sons of men, the sins and the slanders which they have slandered, but whoever slanders the holy spirit does not have forgiveness forever, but is liable for eternal judgement.

The second direct object noun ("blasphemies") does not occur at Quman or in the texts collected in MPAT, but occurs in Targum Neofiti to Leviticus 24:12 and a variant to Targum Jonathan to 1 Samuel 2:3.[197] In the former passage the noun is used in the plural adverbially and has the narrower meaning of pronouncing God's name, but the usage in Mark 3:28 is not so specific. In the latter we read 'blasphemies will not come out of your mouth' which has the more general meaning of 'slander' and therefore provides better background for our passage. The verb slander is likewise not attested in our earliest Middle Aramaic texts but it occurs in Targum Jonathan to 1 Kings 21:10 which reads 'you slandered (גדיפתא) before the Lord...' It also occurs in Hebrew and of its seven occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, it is most often translated by βλασφημέω, hence why I reconstruct it here. If this is correctly reconstructed it is also evident the relative clause only modifies גדפיא. The noun שבקו only occurs in Targum Neofiti to Numbers 7:16 and is clearly cognate with the verb שבק, but admittedly this is a slender basis for a reconstruction. Perhaps the Greek has translated more idiomatically at this point and we should follow those who suggest לא ישתבק לה "will not be forgiven." I am not certain about the last clause since one of the words does not occur in Middle Aramaic. However, I have tentatively followed Matthew Black who suggests the meaning above.[198] What this saying apparently means is that in the final judgement which, according to Jesus was to come very soon (e.g. Mark 13:30), there is the possibility of forgiveness for any kind of sin apart from the sin against the holy spirit (on which see below), the penalty for which involved eternal punishment, probably meaning destruction in Gehenna (e.g. Matthew 5:30).

I have here endeavoured to show that this passage in Mark is fully intelligible as it stands and likely goes back to an Aramaic saying of Jesus. This, however, has not been the consensus of scholarship which has tended to view the parallel saying in Matthew and Luke as earlier. I will now examine this saying in order to determine its relation to the Markan passage.

In Matthew 12:31 the author seems to be dependent on Mark since he agrees closely in wording, and this is an assumption shared by many commentators.[199] The Greek text reads

Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, πᾶσα ἁμαρτία καὶ βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἡ δὲ τοῦ πνεύματος βλασφημία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται

Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven to human beings, but the blasphemy of the spirit will not be forgiven.

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195 A. Kuschke, "Das Idiom der 'relativen Negation' im Neuen Testament," *ZNW* 43 (1950-51): 263; Heinz Kruse, "'Die dialektische Negation' als semitisches Idiom," *VT* 4 (1954): 385-400.

196 Guelich, *Mark,* in loc.

197 Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Daniel J. Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978).

198 Black, *Aramaic Approach,* 189.

199 E.g. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 345.

It is immediately obvious this version lacks many of Mark's Semitic features and abbreviates the saying. However, immediately following this is a similar saying which, since it occurs in Luke with almost identical wording but not in Mark, is often regarded as part of the Q source. In Matthew the text reads (v. 32):

καὶ ὃς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ· ὃς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι

and in Luke 12:10:

καὶ πᾶς ὃς ἐρεῖ λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ· τῷ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα βλασφημήσαντι οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται.

It is at once evident that Matthew and Luke differ from each other in several details. For example, Luke begins the first clause with πᾶς, Matthew with the relative pronoun ὃς; Luke has ἐρεῖ for "speak," Matthew εἴπῃ; Luke has the preposition εἰς for "against," Matthew κατὰ. As to which author better preserves the Q text, I am inclined to agree with the commentators who argue that Luke does so in the first clause and Matthew in the second.[200] As with the Markan text, this version in Q contains a number of Semitisms. First, the opening phrase in Luke looks like a literal translation of its Aramaic equivalent (see below). Second, the phrase 'to speak a word against' is an Aramaism, a close parallel to which we find in Daniel 7:25: מלין לצד עליא ימלל 'he will speak words against the most high.'[201] Third, the same construction for forgiveness as in Mark occurs, which, as we have seen, may reflect Aramaic. Fourth, in both Matthew and Luke there is a casus pendens whereby the subject consisting of the relative clause is later picked up by the dative pronoun αὐτῷ.[202] Fifth, in Matthew's text we find antithetical parallelism which is a feature of Hebrew poetry.[203] These features strongly suggest the saying is early and probably goes back to Jesus.

The most striking feature about this text, however, is its use of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in contradistinction to Mark who, as we have seen, has the plural equivalent. There has been much scholarly discussion about the relationship of the Mark and Q versions, and they are very significant inasmuch as they could show בר אנשא was sometimes understood in a generic sense to mean "humankind." How is this so? To answer this question we will review some of the arguments propounded by several of the above mentioned scholars. It should also go without saying that this text is very difficult to understand and I will attempt in my discussion to suggest a plausible solution.

As we have seen, throughout the Gospels ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is a title that refers invariably to Jesus. In any given son of man saying, then, one naturally attempts to understand the phrase as referring to him. When, however, we meet a text such as Matthew 12:32/Luke 12:10 it is difficult to do so and some commentators such as Davies-Allison confess ignorance of its meaning in its current form.[204] As it stands the passage apparently makes a distinction between two types of offence, one directed against the 'Son of Man' which is pardonable and one directed against the holy spirit which is not. A productive approach starts by recognising possible meanings for the underlying Aramaic. As we have seen from Targum Jonathan to Isaiah, it is just possible that בר אנשא could mean "humankind" at the time of Jesus. If so, we have an interesting interpretative possibility. In the 19th century Arnold Meyer, carrying forward several predecessors' suggestions, surmised that בר אנשא in this passage indeed simply meant "humankind" and he provides his own retro-translation:

200 E.g. Casey, *Solution,* in loc.
201 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 34.
202 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 34.
203 E.g. Davies-Allison, *Matthew,* 345.
204 Davies-Allison, *Matthew,* 348.

כל דיימר מלא על ברנש ישתביק לה וכל דיימר על רוחא דקודשא לא ישתביק לה

the first part of which he translates 'Jeder der ein Wort redet gegen einen Mensch, das wird ihm vergeben werden.'[205] He apparently disregarded the definite articles in the Greek since he reconstructed SM in the absolute state: 'a human/son of man.' The contrast is not then between Jesus and the holy spirit but between human beings and God. In a later section of his book Meyer quotes a passage in the Hebrew Bible which provides possible support for his interpretation.[206] 1 Samuel 2 deals with the practices of the priest Eli's wicked sons who, according to v. 22 had been sleeping with temple personnel, and so in vv. 23-25, prompted by reports from the people, Eli confronts his sons. In v. 25a he gives a solemn warning which in the Hebrew reads:

אם יחטא איש לאיש ופללו אלהים ואם ליהוה יחטא איש מי יתפלל לו

if someone sins against someone else, God may mediate for them; but if someone sins against YHWH, who will mediate for them? (my translation)

There is here a clear distinction between sinning against people, which is forgivable, and sinning against God, which is not, and the wording of this passage immediately strikes the reader as similar to Matthew 12:32 par. Luke 12:10. In addition, the Hebrew word איש used for 'person' in this passage is similar to Aramaic בר אנש. It is therefore not surprising to see the two passages mentioned together in scholarly discussion. If this passage in 1 Samuel contains a general maxim, is it not logical to think one in the New Testament with a similar wording may say something similar? A modern proponent of Meyer's view is Casey who believes this passage matches the idiom which he supposedly finds in Aramaic literature.[207] In his discussion he stresses that he does not believe the passage says nothing about Jesus. On the contrary, as we have seen above, when a speaker employs this idiom, he uses a general maxim which, by implication, has a specific reference to him/herself.[208] It is therefore helpful to know the context of a saying. A small problem arises with our passage, however, for one author has apparently removed this saying from its context. In Matthew Jesus speaks these words during a dispute with the Pharisees, while in Luke during a discourse covering several topics. But since a similar saying occurs in Mark 3:28-29, I tentatively follow those scholars who argue Matthew has preserved the original context.[209] If this is correct, we are confronted with a dispute from Jesus' ministry over the power by which he casts out demons. Is it from God or Satan? His opponents claim it is from the latter, but Jesus strongly disagrees with this assessment. Having made accusations against him, Jesus then provides his own rhetorical rejoinder in the form of this general maxim which has specific application to himself. It also implies that Jesus regarded himself as belonging to humankind. If Casey is correct, Jesus would have been implying that in slandering him and his exorcisms, they are in fact slandering God himself who is working through Jesus. We could paraphrase "you can reject me as a human, but in rejecting my work you are actually rejecting God, and good luck finding forgiveness for that!"

The view of Meyer, Casey and other scholars is very attractive for it makes intelligible a very difficult passage. Moreover, Lindars has increased the plausibility of this reading by comparing it to the saying in Mark 3:28-29 which we have already studied. In his view the two passages are alternate translations of a single Aramaic logion, and if this is the case, the version in Mark may show that בר אנשא could be understood generically. On the basis of the Mark and Q versions Lindars reconstructs the Aramaic as follows:

וכל דיאמר מלה לבר אנשא ישתבק לה וכל דיאמר לרוחא דקודשא לא ישתבק לה[210]

205 Meyer, *Muttersprache,* 94.
206 Meyer, *Muttersprache,* 142.
207 Casey, *Solution,* 140.
208 Casey, *Solution,* 143.
209 See the discussion in Davies-Allison, *Matthew,* 344.
210 I have transferred his transliteration into Aramaic script.

Q has then translated: ‘And everyone who says a word against a man, there will be forgiveness to him.’[211] If he has correctly reconstructed the Aramaic, this is a very natural translation. The quantifier כל ‘anyone/everyone’ would serve as the subject of the relative clause introduced by the ubiquitous ד; ‘Son of man’ as the indirect object ofאמר; the verb שבק as the verb of the main clause; and the antecedent of לה would be ‘anyone/everyone who.’[212] This construction is common in Aramaic and we see it, for example, in Ezra 7:26a which reads:

וכל די לא להוא עבד דתא די אלהך ודתא די מלכא אספרנא דינה להוא מתעבד מנה

The Septuagint translates:

καὶ πᾶς, ὃς ἂν μὴ ᾖ ποιῶν νόμον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ νὸμον τοῦ βασιλέως ἑτοίμως, τὸ κρίμα ἔσται γιγνόμενον ἐξ αὐτοῦ

And everyone who is not doing the law of God and the law of the king willingly, judgement will be done to him.

The grammatical structure is similar to the Q passage, particularly Luke’s version, and the Septuagint’s translation of Ezra 26a confirms the Q passage as a natural translation of Lindars’ Aramaic text. Thus in his view Q has correctly understood the grammar but not the meaning of בר אנשא, which, with Casey and others, he regards as a general reference to humankind.[213] On the other hand, so his theory goes, Mark has correctly understood בר אנשא but not the grammar. The first element כל is taken as an absolute with מלה in apposition to it. Due to the relative ד, this forms a relative clause which functions as the object of the verb אמר, and the subject of this verb is impersonal. Since מלה can refer to a ‘thing’ and have a collective meaning, we can translate ‘all things which one speaks...’ The second verb ישתביק is also impersonal and is modified by לבר אנשא which refers to the entity affected by the verb. Mark understands this collectively and renders with a dative of reference. The final element לה then has מלה as its antecedent rather than the relative clause.[214] According to this understanding it would seem Lindars’ retro-translation should be translated: ‘all things which are spoken, there can be forgiveness to humankind for them.’ As Lindars notes, the verb אמר does not mean ‘blaspheme’ per se, and this meaning has to be imported from the following clause which contains ל + אמר which, if we assume ellipsis of מלה, can carry this meaning.[215] In his view Mark or his source confirms this by adding ‘sins and blasphemies’ in apposition to מלה. And thus we end up with the Greek version as found in Mark 3:28-29. Lindars’ hypothesis could show it was possible and maybe even natural for Mark or his source to render בר אנשא collectively/generically, not as a title, and this may provide us with confirmation that Jesus, at least occasionally, used the phrase in this manner.

Attractive though this hypothesis is, it has serious weaknesses. First, it would be a very awkward way to understand the Aramaic, especially when we have seen how easily it lends itself to the translation in Q. Secondly, Lindars’ translation of his Aramaic source which is itself hypothetical is implausible. Where, for example, on his reconstruction, do we find the idea of blasphemy in the first clause, assuming Mark’s understanding? As we have seen Lindars’ says we should import it from the second clause where it contains all the necessary elements apart from מלה which we should supply.[216] However, if we follow this procedure for the first clause we then have two occurrences of מלה and an Aramaic sentence which makes no sense, regardless of whether this has been clarified by the addition of ‘sins and blasphemies.’ Third, as I have tried to show above, the

211 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 36.
212 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 36.
213 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 34.
214 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 36.
215 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 36.
216 Lindars, *Son of Man,* 36.

saying in Mark 3:28-29 makes perfect sense as a literal translation of an independent Aramaic logion which is intelligible without reference to the Q version. This seems to be supported by Matthew who in 12:31, 32 actually distinguishes between these two sayings. I would even go further than this and suggest, with a couple of scholars, that Jesus is responsible for both of them.[217] A possible objection to this is that in Mark and Matthew they both occur in the same context, namely a dispute about the power Jesus invoked during his exorcisms. However, I do not see reason to think he could not have spoken both of these sayings on a single occasion, or perhaps on different occasions, if controversy surrounding his exorcisms was a regular occurrence.

What, however, are the implications of this for understanding SM. Does the saying contradict our Middle Aramaic evidence that בר אנשא was not in fact used generically? If the sayings are different, then Mark does not give evidence that בר אנשא can be so used, for, as we have seen, the form likely underlying the Markan text is the plural of the above phrase which is well attested in Middle Aramaic sources. This is also in line with what we observed above about בר אנשא, namely, that it was not a standard way of referring to humankind at the time of Jesus and would have struck Jesus' hearers as unusual. Thus, in contrast to Casey, Lindars and others, it was a perfect term for Jesus to use if he wanted to *distinguish* this person from others. This leads us to ask, however, if Mark is not so useful for understanding the SM saying in Q because in fact it is based on a different Aramaic logion altogether, what did Jesus mean by the Q saying?

Many critical commentaries give a similar explanation of this passage. They firstly take note of the context (at least in Matthew), namely a dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees over the former's exorcisms, and then observe how the latter reject his claim to be working on God's behalf.[218] Followed by the unforgivable sin saying, the passage seems to declare that the Pharisees have indeed committed this sin which effectively consists of assigning the work of God to Satan and thereby rejecting God's offer of forgiveness and salvation.[219] There is much to commend this line of interpretation and in several details it is very helpful. However, what commentators do not seem to wrestle with adequately is the distinction Jesus apparently makes between himself and the holy spirit. It is completely understandable why sinning against God is not forgivable, but why then is it forgivable to sin against Jesus, the very centre and culmination of God's purposes according to the evangelists?

Along the right lines may be the solution which contrasts Jesus' pre- and post- vindication state.[220] But, as Allison-Davies note, SM 'is not simply a designation of the earthly Jesus.[221] I would therefore like to suggest that the primary category which should be invoked for understanding this passage is that of agency, and I apologise in advance to any scholars who may have already suggested this and whose research I have missed. In ancient Jewish literature we sometimes find the concept of agency, namely that a superior could assign a task to an inferior which the latter, known as the agent, performs on the former's behalf. The agent is often so invested with their sender's authority that in a functional sense they are equated with their sender. This concept is usually invoked in discussions of NT Christology.[222] I here suggest that it is forgivable to sin against the SM because Jesus regarded himself as God's agent.

In 1954 Heinz Kruse published an article discussing a particular Semitic idiom he entitles "dialektische Negation" whereby something is negated but the negation is not to be understood in absolute terms.[223] In his view this phenomenon could explain several difficult OT passages which seem to make rather extreme claims if understood in absolute terms. The most significant of these is

217 Stein, *Mark,* in loc. who quotes France.
218 See e.g. Stein, *Mark,* in loc.
219 E.g. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), in loc.
220 See Davies-Allison, *Matthew,* 347.
221 Davies-Allison, *Matthew,* 347.
222 See e.g. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (2nd ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).
223 Kruse, "dialektische Negation."

Hosea 6:6 which is sometimes taken to be a rejection of the sacrificial system instituted by Moses. However, understood in the manner Kruse advocates, we could translate it along the following lines "I do not so much desire sacrifice as mercy, or burnt offerings as the knowledge of God."[224] Moreover, he believes there are several contexts wherein this usage is likely to be employed, one of which is when ideas about "sendende Autorität und Gesandter" are involved, and to illustrate this he discusses the pericope in Exodus 16 where, since they have no food, the people grumble against Moses and Aaron (v. 3).[225] In v. 8 they reply to the people לא עלינו תלנתיכם כי על יהוה which, literally translated, is "not against us are your grumblings, but against YHWH." Here, however, Kruse detects his idiom and paraphrases:

Ihr murrt gegen uns, aber dieses Murren ist *eigentlich, im Grunde,* nicht so sehr gegen uns als gegen den Herrn gerichtet, dessen Gesandte wir sind.[226]

Here Moses and Aaron distance themselves from their sender Yahweh, implying he is greater than them, has authority over them, and is the one personally offended by the people's complaints. The idea that Moses is God's agent is found elsewhere in the Pentateuch, perhaps most significantly in Exodus 7:1 where during instructions regarding how to confront Pharaoh, Yahweh says

ראה נתתיך אלהים לפרעה ואהרן אחיך יהיה נביאך

behold I have made you god to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet.

Here Moses is so invested with Yahweh's authority that he is given the title אלהים 'god' and Aaron is described as his 'prophet,' meaning that Pharaoh's rejection of Moses' message in the ensuing narrative is tantamount to rejecting the message of Yahweh himself. Also in Numbers 12, when Miriam and Aaron criticise Moses because of his marriage to a Cushite (v.1), Yahweh sternly rebukes them on account of the special place Moses holds as his prophet. Yet Moses in essence is just a man and several places in the Hebrew Bible emphasise his humble position before God by describing him as עבד יהוה 'the servant of Yahweh' (e.g. Deuteronomy 34:5, Joshua 1:1). Hence it seems there is a tension between passages that exalt Moses and ones that denigrate him, and Exodus 16:8 fits into this latter category.

Turning to the Gospels, it seems clear that Jesus thought of himself as God's messenger. For example, in Mark 6 par. John 4:44 he describes himself as a prophet, in Luke 10:22 par. Matthew 11:27 as the unique revealer of God's mysteries, and in Mark 9:37b states "whoever receives me does not receive me but the one who sent (ἀποστείλαντά) me," a passage which also uses dialectical negation and in exactly the place we would expect it.[227] Jesus here stresses that he is so much the messenger of God that to receive him in a sense *is* to receive God. On the other hand, there are passages where he subordinates himself to God and stresses his humble position. For example, in Mark 10:18, in response to the wealthy man, he asks "how are you saying that I am good? No one is good except one: God," and in John 14:28b declares "truly truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is one sent (ἀπόστολος) greater than the one who sent (πέμψαντος) him."[228] Thus in the Gospel tradition we see the same interplay of exaltation and subordination as of Moses in the Pentateuch. Both are mighty messengers of God, but at the same time also his inferiors. What does this have to do with 'dialectical negation'? In his article Kruse argues that the idea can be present in a given passage even if the strict grammatical construction is not.[229] From the Hebrew Bible he cites 1 Samuel 15:22:

224 Kruse, "dialektische Negation," 389.
225 Kruse, "dialektische Negation," 389.
226 Kruse, "dialektische Negation," 390, italics original.
227 Kruse, "dialektische Negation," 389.
228 Whether or not this saying is authentic, it agrees with the sentiment expressed in the other passages.
229 Kruse, "dialektische Negation," 396.

Does Yahweh delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as obeying the voice of Yahweh. Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, to heed than the fat of rams.[230]

We could paraphrase this text so that it forms a dialectical negation, 'Yahweh does not delight in burnt offerings as much as obedience to his word,' and it still preserves the sense of the text. From the NT he cites Matthew 12:48, the pericope dealing with who Jesus' true family are.[231] Although not formulated as such, the sense is 'my biological family are not so much my family as those who follow me.' I think this phenomenon occurs in our Q passage, the central idea of which we might paraphrase: 'in rejecting my exorcisms, you are not so much rejecting me as you are the one who sent me.' Jesus, then, is perhaps claiming the status of God's messenger, meaning slander directed toward him *as a messenger* is not so serious. However, in slandering Jesus and his ministry his opponents slander God, a sin for which there is no forgiveness. Moreover, although my case does not rest on the similarity between the roles of Jesus and Moses and only uses the concept of agency as a point of comparison, there may incidentally be a contextual link with the Moses narrative which could support the above argument. Matthew and Luke both record a saying which is likely derived from Q, in the former reading 'But if by the spirit of God I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (12:28). Luke's text is the same except for his substitution of 'finger of God' where Matthew has 'spirit' and many scholars here believe Luke to have preserved the original form (Luke 12:20). This phrase likely refers to Exodus 8:19 where in the face of Yahweh's miracles, Pharaoh's magicians exclaim "This is the finger of God." Both evangelists place the logion in the context of Jesus' exorcisms and Matthew may even intend it to form part of his miracle complex which some have argued parallels the Exodus plague cycle.[232] Thus a possible connection with Moses and hence with the idea of agency in the unforgivable sin logion is made more likely, but in any case the argument does not depend on it.

My argument assumes that SM is a simple designation for Jesus, lacking further meaning or allusion. However, it becomes problematic if our phrase does indeed contain these, for they may show agency to be an inappropriate category for this passage. I refer primarily to attempts to understand the SM sayings in light of the celestial figure in Daniel 7:13 who is described as 'one like a son of man.' The scholarship on this passage is vast and there is much debate, for example, whether this figure is to be understood as an individual, or a symbolic representation of Israel, but to enter this debate would go beyond the scope of this essay. Needless to say, if Jesus in some sense identified himself with this figure, he likely ascribed to himself a position of power and authority. If this forms the background to Matthew 12:31 par. Luke 12:10, as argued by Caragounis and others, it is difficult to understand why Jesus would so denigrate himself simply as God's messenger.[233] Nevertheless, allusion to Daniel 7 or not, the passage still teaches sinning against SM is forgivable, and we are left with the same problem as before. Therefore, this forms no significant objection to the argument.

In this section, I have attempted to do several things. First I tried to show that Mark's version of the unforgivable sin passage is likely an authentic word or Jesus, second that it is independent of the equivalent saying in Q which likewise goes back to Jesus. Third, I then attempted to understand the SM saying in the Q passage as a unique reference to Jesus over against scholars who wish to understand it generically, and I appealed to material in the Hebrew Bible concerned with Moses and the concept of agency to explain it. I hope my attempt is deemed successful.

Conclusion

230 Kruse, "dialektische Negation," 396; my translation.
231 Kruse, "dialektische Negation," 396.
232 See Hanger, *Matthew,* in loc.
233 Chrys C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God, Son of Man, and Jesus' Self-Understanding," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (1989): 3-23.

We began this essay by paying careful attention to the Greek ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου which appeared to be a literal translation of a determinate Aramaic expression, most likely בר אנשא. We then surveyed the usage of this phrase in both its emphatic and absolute states in Middle Aramaic, which, following leading Aramaists, we regarded as the type most relevant for our inquiry. We surveyed usage in the Dead Sea scrolls and concluded there are no examples of this phrase in the emphatic state in this corpus. Its absolute state in both the singular and plural number, however, was used several times, but only with an indefinite or generic meaning. Next we examined the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan, concluding that the usage here is identical to what we find in the Scrolls, except for two passages in Isaiah which evidence SM used in the emphatic state. One of these had a specific referent ('the son of man who...'), and the other a generic meaning ('humankind'). We then turned to the later Palestinian Targums, considered Late Aramaic, and found many instances of our phrase with a generic sense in both the emphatic and absolute states. In the next section we concerned ourselves with the works of several scholars who have contended that in Aramaic sources SM, in either the emphatic or absolute states, was never used as a title, but rather had the mundane meaning 'humankind/being.' Applying this to the New Testament, they argued Jesus used the phrase in a similar manner. We looked briefly at Wellhausen and Meyer in the 19th century, but considered in detail the more recent works of Vermes, Lindars, Bauckham and Casey, with the aim of testing their hypotheses against the Aramaic evidence reviewed at the start. We concluded that the approach of these scholars was ultimately unsuccessful on the grounds that they relied on evidence too late to be relevant to the New Testament, and that when subjected to analysis, the various Gospel SM sayings do not tolerate a generic meaning.

In the second section we provided a detailed exegetical discussion of the so-called 'unforgivable sin' passages found in Mark 3:28-29, Matthew 12:31-32 and Luke 12:10, in order to apply the conclusions reached above to a specific saying. While typically viewed as being variants of one another, we argued for the minority position that they in fact derive from two separate sayings of Jesus. The saying common to Matthew and Luke we then attempted to understand not as a mistranslation from an Aramaic source which the Markan version has translated differently, but as an intelligible saying of Jesus which can be understood by invoking the category of agency.

In sum, although not explicitly setting out to do so, this essay has ended up more or less confirming the position of such scholars as Dalman, Owen and Shepherd, and Hurtado, arguing that, given our knowledge of its use in Aramaic sources, בר אנשא would not likely have had a generic meaning in Jesus' teaching, but would have referred to a specific individual. It has not been within our purview to comment upon the manifold other issues surrounding the SM debate, but I hope my research sets the discussion on a firmer linguistic footing.

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